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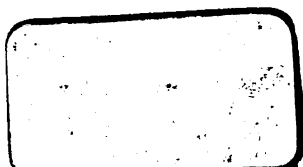
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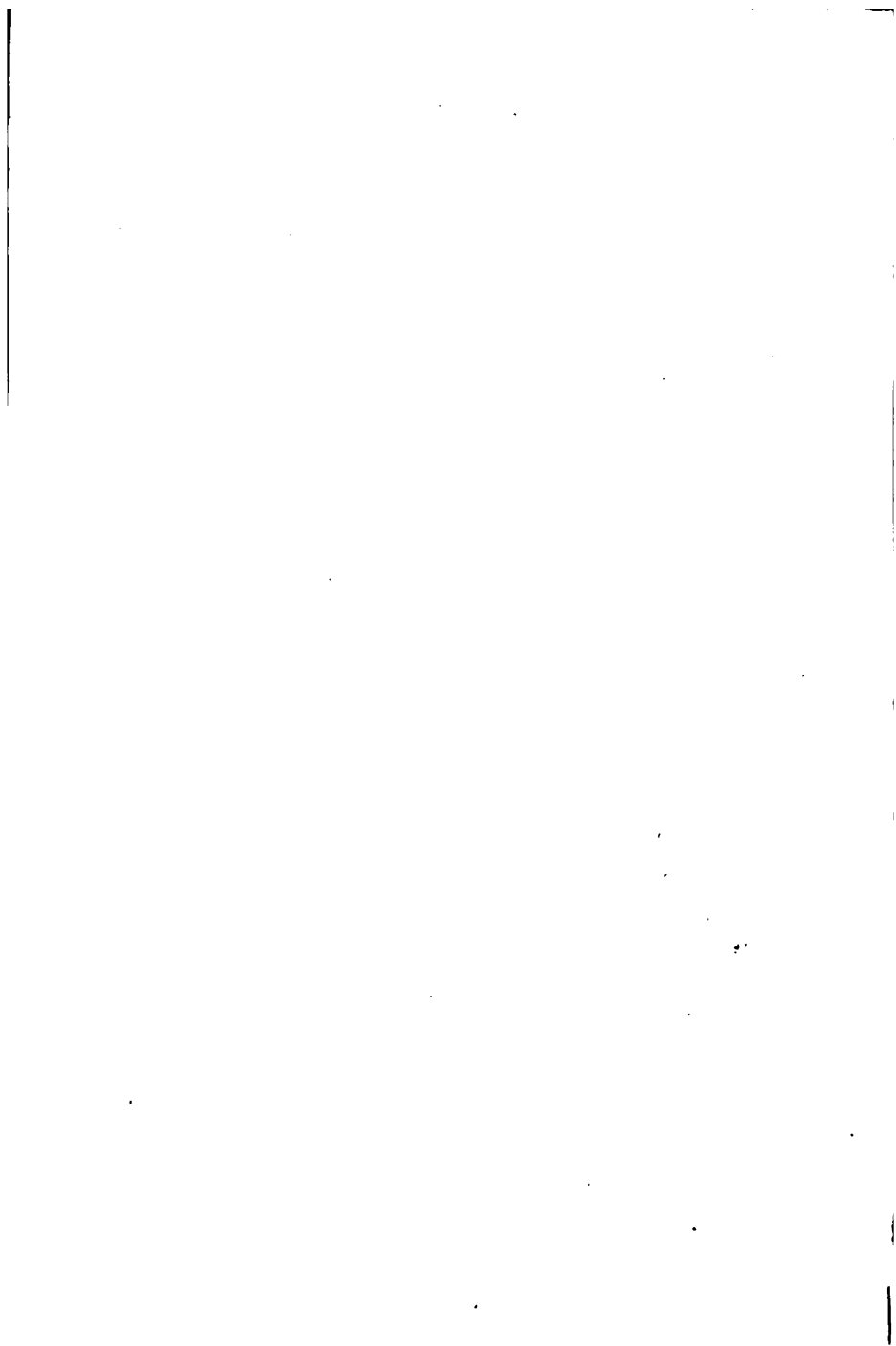




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HUMPHREY DYOT.



HUMPHREY DYOT.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES GREENWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "A NIGHT IN A WORKHOUSE."



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HUMPHREY DYOT.

CHAPTER I.

THE "REAPER'S" LUCK FAILS HER AT LAST.

DROWN she must, there was no help for her.

Through seven long hours her crew had struggled bravely for her against her adversaries the wind and the waves, as men will struggle for a distressed ship long their familiar home. It was no hasty friendship, that which existed amongst her crew for the rare old merchantman. There were sailors aboard the "Reaper" who had known her and cast their fortunes in with hers through the prime of their lives and until they were growing grey men, and never till now had she ailed alarmingly.

There are men who die old at fifty, and men who live till fourscore and then die young ; so there are ships. The "Reaper " was one of these evergreens. To and fro she had carried her rich freights until the number of her voyages were out of date and reckoning ; and it seemed that the winds but refreshed her, and that the sea cherished and strengthened her as the earth cherishes and strengthens a living tree.

But now, as it seemed, her lease of luck was run out ; and her long-tried friends, the winds and the waves, as though exasperated by some discovery they had made of her unworthiness, turned suddenly against her, with all the bitter fury of love turned to hate. It was no secret to them which were the old ship's weakest points and where she was tenderest for want of patching, and they availed themselves to the fullest of their knowledge. What chance had she against such terrible odds ? At the commencement of the tussle, and while the waves showed but weak heads, and the wind's voice was but thin and shrill, the sailors made light of the matter,

and talked pleasantly amongst themselves that the "old gal" would presently have once more a chance of showing her mettle. It never for a moment entered their heads that she could have run to the end of her tether of luck. "What! the old 'Reaper' knock under to such a gale as this? Had she not faced and come right and tight out of a hundred worse?" There was the misfortune. Had she hitherto faced only a score such gales; or, say, as many again, she would have had so much the more strength and pluck to meet this one. But one might as well discourse to a brick wall as hope for a successful use of such a line of argument with a sailor who believes in the luck of his ship.

Besides, it was only make believe when they said that the old East India-man had with impunity breasted severer tempests than the one that now distressed her. It was all very well to tell her so; and this the foolish fellows, out of love for her, did do, calling it out aloud one to the other, and affecting a cheery tone, as though the ship had ears to hear and a heart to be comforted by the blithe assur-

ance; but it was not true. Each moment the wrath of the elements increased, the wind shrieking havoc amongst the spars, and canvas, and cordage, and the waves thundering against the vessel's crazy hull as a creditor knocks, impatient, at a debtor's door, demanding admission instantly, and a settlement on the nail of an account long standing. Banging against her came a ponderous sea, causing her to shudder from stem to stern.

"What d'ye think of it, Billy?" inquired a mariner, who, as part of the ship, had dutifully shuddered too, and now looked sickly. He spoke in a low whisper, however, and into his friend's ear, as they bent at the pump, so that the "old gal" might not hear.

"It can't be a going wrong with her, can it?" was Billy's cautious reply.

"It wouldn't if she had had fair play, Billy, eh? It's all along of him."

"You mean Jonah?"

"Jonah, as you calls him. That's what I do mean. Her old luck sprung a leak the hour he came aboard."

Low as was the whispering between

Billy and his friend, it had not entirely escaped the ears of a third man working close by.

"You're about right there, shipmate," said he. "If he isn't a blue chick of the old un, I'm a nigger. It would be a good thing if he'd kick the bucket, so that we might heave him over."

"How is he, have you heard?"

"Mortal bad. It ain't often a fellow gets out of that sort of fever, I can tell you."

Still raged the sea, and still shrieked the wind, rending and tearing amongst the rigging, and whisking off rejoicingly, with the detached flinders, as though such were its proper food and it had been long kept hungry. Stealthily and surely did the poor ship's other enemy sap its foundation, and there take such stout possession that now nothing could be hoped for but to keep the water low crouching in the richly-stored hold, until the storm abated and gave leisure for its ousting.

But the storm did not abate. Discovering how tenaciously the old ship clung to life, it grew ten times more furi-

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of the one that was lost; as for the other boat, it would have been as safe to have put to sea in a flour-tub.

"One of fifteen, Mr. Grayling; you are out in your reckoning," said Captain Crosbie. "Sixteen, and the sixteenth more trouble than any other three, I'm afraid, poor fellow!"

Hearing this, the men gathered round, looked at each other, and there was some whispering.

"To be sure—sixteen," said the mate. "As you say, sir, I shouldn't have forgotten him; he's likely to give us cause to remember him."

"Begging your honour's pardon," here put in the spokesman of the whispering seamen, "the mate was quite right when he just spoke. Fifteen is our number; and quite enough, too, for such a cockleshell as our boat is. You'll excuse my saying as much, captain."

"More than enough, my lad; still, sixteen insists on being sixteen, and wouldn't bate one if our boat was but half the size. Since no better will be, we must make the best of it, and be smart about it,

too. You will see that the few necessities we can take are put into the boat, Mr. Grayling."

And the captain hurried towards his cabin, as though unwilling to hear what he knew was in the mind of the seaman, and all ready for utterance. But the man called after him.

"Begging your pardon, captain, no more than fifteen can go in the boat. That's what we all say, I believe, ship-mates?"

"All of us."

"But the sick man below makes the sixteenth, does he not?"

"We'll do without him, if it makes no difference to you, captain."

"D'ye mean to tell me," exclaimed kind-hearted Captain Crosbie, "d'ye mean to tell me, men, that because a poor fellow is laid by the heels and can't help himself, that you'll bilk him of his fair chance of saving his life? D'ye mean to tell me that? Come, cry 'all of us!' again, if you do mean it?"

"All of us!" In a lower tone, and each man with some sort of disguise in his

voice, as though he was not anxious that it should be recognized ; it was impossible, however, to misjudge the earnestness and determination of the prompt response.

"But he is one of yourselves," urged Captain Crosbie ; "you will be ashamed to think of this, or to hear it spoken of, if by a miracle our lives are saved."

But the men, busying about the boat and making her ready for launching, took no heed, except that one of them exclaimed—

"No more of Jonah, lads, we've had enough of him !"

"Be men !" persisted the captain ; "we all have need of mercy to-night, the Lord knows ; don't deny this poor wretch what you yourselves presently may cry for in vain."

"I speak for myself," cried the spokesman ; "and I say this, that in an open boat on a rough sea, I'd rather have the room than the company of a man scorched up with a fever as catching as the plague !"

"And who is likely at any moment to go cranky and upset the lot," cried an-

other man. "If he's so very sick and like to die, he may as well go quiet where he lies, as be hauled up here to die in our company. Who is he? What is he, that we should play chuckstone with our last chance for his sake? It is our belief that the old ship would have lived, taut and sound, till this minute, but that there is something about him that is too much for her."

"Ay, ay! Amen to that!" responded the seamen, one and all.

"They'll have their way, sir," said the mate in an undertone. "The sooner we are off the better. She is fast settling down."

"It seems awfully inhuman to leave him behind; though it is a great chance that the sudden exposure to the cold air would kill him at once," added the captain, as a balm to his distressed feelings on the subject. "And his death here will be so sudden that he will hardly be aware of it. As you say, Mr. Grayling, it would be very embarrassing should he grow light-headed in the boat. I shall endeavour to save my most precious charge, of course, Mr. Gray-

ling. In point of money value, the old hulk and her cargo had better be lost than that."

And as he spoke he went down to his cabin to secure the "precious charge" in question, the worth of which exceeded that of the old merchantman and the wealth of silk, and spices, and tea with which she was laden.

It was in a small compass as might be seen; for the captain came up the cabin stairs carrying it in his hand. The precious charge might have been half a dozen sandwiches, since it was contained in an old-fashioned japanned tin sandwich-box, which, however, was taped and sealed with great care.

"Since they are ignorant of its existence on board, they may as well remain so," whispered Captain Crosbie to the mate. "It's as sinful, I think, to tempt men as it is for men to yield to temptation. Nobody will suspect what I have here, Mr. Grayling."

"They will suspect less, perhaps, if I carry it, sir," replied the mate. "I can stow it snugly in the inner pocket of my

jacket, and I'll take care to keep it buttoned."

"That's a good fellow," said Captain Crosbie, who had sailed with the man who was now his first mate through seventeen years and over. "It will be safer with you, no doubt."

As possibly it might, if it came to fighting for the safe-keeping of the precious charge ; for, whereas Captain Crosbie was a small, plump-made man, with but a fringe of white hair round his respectable old bald head, the mate was a man of vast length and breadth, whose very hair looked muscular in its wavy crispness.

By this time the boat was ready for lowering, and the sailors, knowing not from one moment to another but that the crippled ship, now driving at the will of the wind, might go down with a run, were growing impatient. But they might have been better employed than in idle grumbling if they had only given a minute's inspection to the lowering-tackle, since, when all was ready, there was discovered a hitch in it, and the boat, swinging three feet

or so below the davits, could move no further.

This was awkward. Unless great care was taken, one end of the boat was likely to run, while the other end held, in which case the fifteen lives would not be worth a candle-snuff. It was bad enough as it was, with the frail thing in which was all their trust banging against the side of the rolling ship.

"One of us must climb back again and set her clear," spoke Mr. Grayling; "I'll do it myself."

And, agile as a cat, he was back on deck in a moment. Then he found that a rope had somehow got jammed in a block so that all the strength of his arms could not move it. "It has got to move, and it must," exclaimed the mate, after half a minute's fruitless exertion; and then, the better to carry out his determination against the refractory rope, he whipped off his heavy over-jacket, and went at it again.

Now he did better. A long pull, and a strong pull, and the lowering gear was cleared of obstruction, and at that identical

moment the old ship gave a sudden heel forward, as though to take the final plunge. The mate had some apprehension of this, evidently, judging from the nimbleness he displayed in regaining the hanging boat, which presently touched the restless billows, and presently again, frightfully pitching and tossing, was fifty yards away from the doomed ship.

"Thank God for deliverance so far!" exclaimed Captain Crosbie, piously. "I believe she has less life in her than we thought an hour ago. I began to fear, Joe Grayling, when you——"

But the captain did not finish the sentence so began. Advanced so far, he pulled up short, and with a sudden paleness of face.

"Good God, Joe!" exclaimed he, catching the mate by the sleeve, "was it in the pocket of your *over-jacket* that you placed the tin case?"

The mate did not ask "why." With a face as pale as the captain's, he clapped his hand to that part of his breast where the pocket of the over-jacket would have been had he worn it, and then, in great

dismay, shook his head, and looked eagerly after the deserted ship.

"I left it lying where I pulled it off," said he; "it's lying there now."

"Then, indeed, I am a ruined man," cried Captain Crosbie, in a despairing voice. "It is not insured for a penny, and a hundred petty fortunes such as mine would not replace it. I was a fool to take charge of anything so precious."

"I'll venture after it if we can pull back to her and get close enough," exclaimed the unlucky mate, looking as though of a good mind to try a desperate swim to recover the lost treasure.

"I'll give every man here twenty pounds if I get it back," said Captain Crosbie, excitedly; "I'll give forty—fifty pounds a man."

"Pull, men!" urged the mate, divesting himself of his other jacket and his neckerchief, and taking an oar with the strength of a giant.

It was the merest chance if they succeeded had the rest set to work as heartily, for by this time the ship, helpless in the grasp of the winds, was driving at a great

rate. But they did not try heartily. It might have been their intention, for fifty pounds is a temptation to poor men, but it was balked at the outset. Within the last hour the moon had shown itself just a little at times scudding through the cloud-banks, but now it struggled forward and gave a better light, so that the ship was more distinctly visible. Something else, too, was visible. It was the figure of a man, attired only in his shirt and drawers, and with his long hair all to windward, leaning over the ship's side and waving a signal, and crying out at the painfulest pitch of his voice. What it was that he cried out could only be guessed at, for the wind caught his words, and blew them all out of shape before they reached the boat; but the signal he was waving at least one man in the boat was able to recognize. It was the mate's jacket. Being the handiest thing, the affrighted man had caught it up, and was now holding it by a sleeve, and flourishing it above his head. Seeing which, the mate, in the extremity of his terror lest the tin sandwich-box should fly out of the pocket and tumble overboard, cried

out as loudly as the strange man on the wreck, shaking his fist at him.

"It will be lost now; it must be lost! Put it down, you, sir, d'ye hear!" roared Mr. Grayling, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

"It doesn't matter," said Captain Crosbie, quietly; "don't you see that they have altered the course of the boat?"

And so, indeed, they had. They knew the jacket-waver well enough: it was "Jonah," whom the mariner Billy had alluded to; the unfortunate wretch, fever-stricken and shunned as a pestilence, whom the sailors had flatly refused to bring along in the boat with them. What had roused him (for he was in a sort of stupor rather than sleep when one of the crew had last taken a peep at him) mattered little; there he was, clasping his hands, and still imploring them to put back and take him off.

Not likely! Death himself might as well have stood there beckoning with his bony finger in invitation. Back to the ship, indeed! Not for fifty times fifty pounds a man. Any way but that way.

And so agreeing—the rowers as well as the man at the helm—they pulled off, leaving the frantic man, Humphrey Dyot by name, and the crazy “Reaper” to finish their worldly voyaging in company.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH IS RELATED HOW HUMPHREY CAME
ON BOARD THE "REAPER," AND HOW, BY
A MIRACLE, HE ESCAPED FROM HER.

WHATEVER mystery there may have been about the "precious charge" which Captain Crosbie had so cunningly deposited in the japanned box, and which, as it seemed, was so unfortunately after all left to sink with the ill-fated "Reaper," there is no mystery at all about the hero of this story. If the reader has been led to suppose differently, it is a pity, since, of all things, it is desirable to do the unhappy young man the fullest justice.

It is easy enough to acquire the reputation of a Jonah on board a ship, or even that of being "a blue chick of the old un," which, doubtless, is something infinitely more dreadful. How Humphrey Dyot

came to be so regarded is easily told. Coming of a respectable stock that had no especial reason for being proud of him, wilful and headstrong as he was as a boy, and reckless and devil-may-care as a young man, it was finally decided that the very best thing that could be done for him was to provide him a situation abroad. His father had interest, and with little trouble secured for him a situation in the office of a tea-broker at Shanghai, at a liberal salary and very fair promises of advancement. Humphrey made no objection. Excitements on a small scale, and such as present themselves to reckless young men in great towns, he had engaged in until he not only had exhausted the list, but, at a great waste of health, had even gone in for a repetition of a few of the more spicily-flavoured ; but hitherto no great excitement, such as a long sea voyage, with life in a land of enchantment at the end of it, had fallen to his share. So, with the most affectionate farewells of his friends, who were heartily glad to get rid of him, he sailed for China.

And he might have done very well in-

deed, had Shanghai been a place in the soil of which wild oats found no encouragement, and where, for lack of wicked opportunity, the most thoughtless of young men must needs be virtuous and keep steadfast to the straight line; but the city in question being in these matters about twenty per cent. worse than any other under the sun, nothing was easier than for young Mr. Dyot, in the course of a year or so, to slide from off his highly-respectable office-stool down into the gutter. His salary was spent before it was earned, and his hand grew too shaky for penmanship; and so he and the tea-broker parted. After that, being too proud to write home for assistance, he "knocked about," as the saying is, and as his battered and used-up appearance at the end of six months fully testified. How he lived nobody cared less than himself. He was ragged, he had begged to the extremity of the patience of his best friend, his health was shattered, and (to use his own phrase) he was drifting fast to the devil.

Then, as is not uncommon in such cases, there unexpectedly dawned on him a day of remorse, and his better self stood

before him, mirror-wise, so that he might fairly investigate the wretch his worser self had become. He couldn't stand the investigation: before he had got half way through with it, it drove him out of doors, literally, and with a grim determination to make an end of it somehow.

His means of making an end of it, however, were limited. His razor-case contained one means—the most ready, but that he left behind when he rushed away from his squalid lodgings; another way was in the direction of the deep water, where the larger shipping lay in dock; and this last way he took. Listlessly hanging about, and upbraiding himself for his cowardice for being afraid of the deep water, he presently overheard two sailors talking on the wharf.

“Plenty of ships as wants men, but no men as wants ships—leastways, not that I knows on,” said one.

“That's orkard,” returned the other. “She's never a hand too many at best of times, d'ye see; and to be one short this season o' the year is as bad as being two short at another season.”

"You'll have to ship a nigger; there's plenty of niggers to be got."

The seaman addressed, however, replied to this last suggestion in terms involving many uncomplimentary allusions to the negro race generally.

"A handy boy would be better than nobody. You don't know of a handy boy knocking about and wanting home'ard passage?" said he.

"Home'ard passage to where?"

"To England—to London."

"I don't. If I fall across one such, I'll send him to you. The 'Reaper,' isn't it?"

"That's she."

"When do you sail?"

"Day after to-morrow; in the morning, I reckon."

And so the mariners parted.

To England—London! Here was a way of "making an end of it" decidedly preferable to any that had hitherto suggested itself to Humphrey. He was neither an ordinary seaman nor even a handy boy; but he was not yet so debased in his own estimation but that he counted himself better than a nigger. Without further

debating the matter, he marched straight to the hotel where the merchant captains lodged when ashore, and inquired for the captain of the "Reaper."

"You'll find me very willing to work, I assure you, sir," pleaded the downcast wretch, as, cap in hand, he stood in his tatters before Captain Crosbie.

"I dare say, my man; but where is the use of being willing if you are not able? You'd only be in the way. I must say no, I'm afraid."

"I shouldn't require any wages, sir. For God's sake don't turn me away!"

It was not so much the words as the terrible earnestness with which they were uttered that moved the soft-hearted old captain; and the result of a further conversation of ten minutes' duration was that Master Dyot skipped rejoicingly down the steps of the hotel, not only engaged for the voyage, but with sufficient money advanced of his wages to buy him something of a nautical rig.

But though he joined the crew of the "Reaper" with the captain's special commendation, and a mild intimation that

he was a green hand, and they were not to be too hard on him, from the very first they did not take to him. To be sure, he was the most unsailorish sailor that ever essayed to make himself at home in a fork'sal. His slacks hung wofully slack about his long, straight, gentlemanly legs, and those honest articles of garment were further mocked by two feet protruding at their bottoms as white and delicate as a woman's. He called his shipmate "Sir;" and once, when he overset Billy Hogan's peasoup, he offered him a thousand apologies. He was shy and reserved; was evidently embarrassed to find himself obliged to use a meat-skewer in lieu of a fork at dinner, and he did not chew tobacco. That he was willing enough, and obliging, and civil ("a d—n sight too civil," Billy said) nobody could deny; but, somehow, they couldn't "chum" with him nor he with them. Whether the men were less careful of their duties on this voyage than in general is not clear, but one thing is certain—all manner of uncommon though trifling accidents, were daily happening aloft and below, all of which were set down to the

account of the "sailor with a T," as he was commonly spoken of, and as arising from the circumstance of "the ship not liking him." When they were only eleven days from Shanghai, and his unpopularity was at its height, he fell into a fever of a malignancy that of itself was sufficient to show the malice of his disposition. Then a storm arose, with the results of which the reader has been already made acquainted.

The wrecked merchantman was not Humphrey Dyot's coffin, otherwise he could not have been discovered, hale and hearty, walking in Bishopsgate Street, with a leather bag slung over his shoulder at the end of a stick, a matter of eleven months after he was last seen drifting with the wind in the stormy Indian sea. Providence was kind to him. It may be recollected that Captain Crosbie himself was of opinion that the worst of the storm was past, and his conjecture was correct. Within half an hour (as the fifteen men in the little boat, to their great joy, found) the wind abated, and the sea, no longer disturbed in its bed, lay comparatively easy. Fright works wonders. It is quite capable of

killing a man in perfect health, let alone one whose life is burnt half away with fever; and it is equally efficacious to cure a man of an ailment when the doctor has given him up. Fright will cure a man of gout even, as has happily been shown in many well-authenticated cases; and if it can cure gout, it can cure anything, and it is not impossible that it should have cured Humphrey Dyot of his fever. To be sure, he was very bad; but what fright could have been greater or more urgent than the one that fell on him when, lying half asleep in his berth, he grew curious to know why they were lowering the boat (he could hear it bumping against the side plainly enough), and why he no longer heard a tramping of feet overhead, and came up to see? Besides, it is not asserted that he completely recovered from the effects of his fever.

He must have worked as he grew well, however, for the means of his escape was the boat left behind and deemed worthless on account of its leaky condition. It was not very difficult for him to lower his boat when he had patched her and made good

her defects to the best of his ability ; for after the storm came the proverbial calm. Not knowing how long it might be before he met with relief, he carried several handy articles of food with him ; and, being still weak and chilly from his fever, he did not scruple to appropriate the warm over-jacket, the loss of which the mate so deeply lamented.

It was quite as well that he made these little preparations. Even had he possessed a compass and the other requisite tools, the art of navigation was perfectly unknown to him. All he could do was to go with the stream, waving the long stick to which his signal was attached, at the same time keeping a sharp eye on the ugliest patches of his boat's carpentry, lest they should gape and let the sea in. So he drifted all the remainder of that day and all through the cold night, and so on through four days and nights, being at the last much tormented for want of a little fresh water to drink.

And, after all, he did not fall in with a ship. On the morning of the fifth day he drifted into a current of considerable swiftness, and then, all unexpectedly, he disco-

vered land, green and fertile, and scarcely three miles away. A tiny island, one of a thousand that dot the watery waste in this part of the world.

Making the island, however, and landing easily at its shelving banks, his joy turned to bitterness when he found that, besides himself, and the native birds and monkeys, the place contained no other inhabitants. It was better than being in a rotten boat out at sea, however. There was fruit in abundance, and the birds were so tame that they might easily be knocked down with a stick or a stone; while the ground was strewn with dry wood, and he had taken the sensible precaution of bringing with him away from the ship a flint and steel by way of getting a light for his pipe. So, there he was, with firm ground to stand on, and fire, and food, and a comfortable couch of grass to lie on, and he was almost contented; not quite, or he would not so diligently have set his signal—a seaman's shirt tied at the end of a pole, and again lashed to the top bough of the tallest tree that grew near the water's edge.

His signal, however, answered no other purpose but to frighten the birds and excite the curiosity of the monkeys for two months and more; during which time Humphrey Dyot had ample opportunity for reflecting on the follies of his past life, and for making the sternest resolutions as to what should be his future behaviour just so long as it might please God to extend his unworthy life. With nothing but his present thoughts and his past recollections to keep him company, it is not astonishing that his mind grew serious, and that the songs he sang to while away the time and give him some respite from the maddening solitude, were rather of a devout than of a bacchanalian tendency, and that he registered vows—one of which (strict compliance with which, so far from fortifying him from the errors and mistakes of life) would prove in itself to be the most tremendous blunder a mortal could possibly fall into. And the reader who, having read thus far, imagines that there is the slightest probability of his taking an interest in the development of this story, is strongly recommended to make a note of this.

Each day he grew more desperately pious, and each night he raised his voice solemnly and renewed his pledge to carry out the especial vow just hinted at. This he did on the night before the morning when the look-out man of the homeward-bound ship "Poonah" spied his signal, and a boat was put off from that vessel for his rescue. This he did, and even more earnestly than ever before, with his hands raised and his grateful knees pressing the sand of the beach, as he awaited the boat's coming. How many times he reiterated the same foolish vow between that time and when we discover him in Bishopsgate Street, London, with a leather bag slung across his shoulder; or whether he had abandoned all idea of the said strange vow; or, again, whether he had commenced the practice of what he was pledged to, I will not even give a guess, lest I should raise in the mind of my patient reader a curiosity it would be quite impossible just at present to set at rest.

It is growing towards evening of the wintry day, and, comfortably attired, and with a sober gait and a solemn face,

Humphrey is walking the walk of a man who knows where he is going to. Otherwise he might, from his bronzed, foreign-looking face, and his luggage at his shoulder, be mistaken for a person fresh from his ship, and in quest of lodgings. This, however, is not the case. Many weeks had elapsed since the "Poonah" came to anchor (he made several good friends aboard that charitable ship on the homeward voyage), and meanwhile Humphrey had found an asylum at the abode of a slop-tailor in Ratcliff Highway, but at the expiration of that time, and for reasons that need not be here explained, he found it expedient to seek new quarters, and he has found them in Wormwood Street, Bishopsgate Street, and is now on his way to take possession of them.

All manners of people boarded at Tadger's boarding-house, though gentlemen of the maritime profession were decidedly preferred to any other by Tadger, who was a retired Quartermaster of the King's Navy, with a pension for long service and the loss of a hand, in place of which he wore an iron hook which he found exceedingly con-

venient in collecting cups and jugs in the coffee-room. This was Humphrey's first appearance there since he had engaged a bed-room yesterday, and Mr. Tadger greeted him with great civility, addressing him as "captain," and shaking him cordially by the hand, while with his hook he dexterously released the bag from the stick, and made for carrying it into the little bar at the coffee-room. But this its owner would not allow. Mr. Tadger's adroit manoeuvre had taken him by surprise; but, in an instant recovering therefrom, he eagerly, nay, almost rudely, repossessed himself of it.

"I'll take charge of that, thank you, my friend," said he, tucking it under his arm.

"It's very heavy to carry about, captain," said Mr. Tadger; "it'll be all right in my box."

"I'd rather keep it, thank you," answered Mr. Dyot, with some little embarrassment in his tone; "I'm used to the weight of it, and don't feel it."

"Any more luggage coming, captain?" asked Mr. Tadger, a suspicion crossing his

honest mind that possibly the recommendation of his friend, the ship's steward, was misapplied, and that the new lodger was one of that risky sort that carried their luggage about with them.

"There's a large trunk and a small deal box to come. It will be here this evening," replied Humphrey. "I'll go up to my bed-room, if you please."

"Will you take any refreshment, captain?"

"I'll take some tea and a mutton-chop; but don't call me 'captain,' my friend, because I'm nothing of the sort, and I've no desire to be called out of my name," Humphrey replied, with mild severity.

"No offence meant, I assure you, cap—sir, I mean. They're all captains with me, d'ye see; and, in general, it agrees with 'em pretty well. It shan't happen again, since you object, sir. No. 4 is your bed-room. Micah, light the gentleman to No. 4."

And, following his guide, Humphrey went up-stairs, with the bag still hugged beneath his arm. Half-way up he stopped and addressed Mr. Tadger, who was still

lingering in the doorway at the bottom, marvelling at his lodger's modesty.

"You'll excuse me," said Humphrey; "but is there a good lock on the door of No. 4 room?"

"A good lock, and a bolt too, sir. Not that you need be afraid in my house——"

"I'm not afraid, my friend, why should I be?" hastily interrupted Humphrey. "I'm not afraid of being robbed, having little or nothing to lose; but I like privacy." And having entered the room alone, he was heard most distinctly to avail himself of the lock on his door as soon as he closed it on Micah the waiter.

Meanwhile a curious scene was enacting in the public coffee-drinking department of Mr. Tadger's premises. Seated there was an old man in shabby black clothes and a not particularly amiable countenance. It was a hard, sour countenance, with an affectation of pleasantry overspreading it, as though he at that very instant had been called on by a friend whom for his life sake he dare not offend, to give his opinion on some vil-

lanously-sour wine, a glassful of which he had been compelled to swallow. He was a little man, with spare grey hair, and on the table by the side of his coffee-cup was his old hat, wisped round with black crape and containing a speckled cotton handkerchief and a pair of frayed gloves.

The man sitting with him was of quite a different type. He was a youngish man, with a good-humoured, weather-beaten face, and looked like nothing so much as a common sailor, with money in his pocket, and a disposition to spend it. That he was approaching that number of sheets in the wind that to the sailor-mind comprehends the most blissful state of intoxication, was evident from the fact that there lay the change of the sovereign Mr. Tadger had brought him when he paid for the refreshments of himself and his friend, not in the pile that Mr. Tadger had placed it, however, but knocked over by one of the mariner's elbows, both of which were spread on the table to accommodate his heavy head.

This was his position when Humphrey Dyot entered, and he retained it until that

person began to speak, and then he couldn't have raised his head more suddenly if a splinter had run into his cheek. With his arms still folded on the table, he fixed his eyes on the stranger, his mouth twitching strangely, and the bronzed face blanching. He did not move nor speak, but sat like a statue of stone with movable eyes which, stared open at their widest, he employed in gazing at Humphrey and following him when he walked towards the stairs. When Humphrey disappeared, the man suddenly leapt up as though released from some terrible charm, at the same time finding his speech.

"Come away out of this!" exclaimed he, in a terrified whisper, at the same time laying his hand on the shoulder of his companion. "I ain't afraid of any man, but I can't stand ghosts. Come out of this, Mr. Gurd, we will go somewhere else and do our little bit of business."

CHAPTER III.

FURNISHES AN INKLING TO MR. GURD'S PROFESSIONAL PURSUITS.

MR. ANTHONY GURD was by profession medical, and his place of abode was in Old Fish Street, Thames Street, London. N.B. Within one minute's walk of the Monument.

There can be no mistake about Mr. Gurd's address, since it is faithfully copied from the identical circular invented and composed by that gentleman himself, with the able assistance of his sister Mercy, setting forth the scope and scheme of the business they affected as partners. The laws regulating the practice of surgical and medical science were not nearly so severe in those days as they have since become ; but Mr. Gurd was not the man to work under a cloak. He was not duly

licensed as M.D., and he boldly announced the fact in his business circular. Nay, in a sort of way, he made capital of it. "Mr. Anthony Gurd," declared that interesting document, "although fully qualified to pass the most exhaustive examination it is in the power of the College of Physicians to propose, declines the ordeal, regarding it as the merest waste of time, and in some degree degrading to a man who holds his diploma under Nature herself, the Empress of the healing art, sealed with her simple balsams and stamped with the stamp of health. Price one shilling and three-half-pence per box. Allowance made to wholesale dealers, shippers, captains, and foreign agents. All manner of healing ointments and lotions. At home for consultation any evening, excepting Sunday, after six. Miss Mercy Gurd is in attendance daily, for the convenience of ladies anxious to avail themselves of her invaluable advice and services. Side door; second bell. Nurses (wet and dry) provided at the shortest notice and on most reasonable terms.—N.B. A child's caul for sale."

Since in all probability we shall shortly

have the pleasure of personal introduction to Miss Mercy Gurd, it will be unnecessary to keep the aghast young sailor and his friend idle at Tadger's while her appearance and the peculiar nature of her business undergo discussion. It must be pointed out, however, that, although the latter part of the circular above quoted would appear to apply exclusively to Miss Mercy's share in the Old Fish Street business, such is scarcely the fact, since, in its essence, the *nota bene* concerned the male Gurd only.

That is to say, as far as trafficking in the article involved went. Part of Miss Mercy's advertisement would seem to point to her facilities for keeping up the supply of the miraculous storm-and-tempest-proof integument so dear to mariners ; but children's cauls were not in her department ; and if, by mistake, a letter pertaining to that sort of merchandise came under her notice, she troubled herself no further than to place the matter in her brother's hands, having perfect confidence in that gentleman's resources towards executing the commission.

After all, however, and making the most liberal allowance for any occasional contributions that might come through the wet and dry auxiliaries, it was astonishing how Anthony continued to keep the caul market supplied. For upwards of twenty years "N.B. A child's caul for sale" had appeared as the climax of all his trade advertisements. During that period hundreds of persons of maritime pursuits had negotiated for that caul; bid for it, bated the price of it, paid down the money for it, and carried it away; and lo! after all, there it was still to be found in the little drawer in Anthony's desk, along with the letter from the parent of the child whose first suit it had comprised, detailing the harrowing circumstances that induced her to part with it for the trifling sum of five pounds ten. It was like the enchanted thaler of German lore, that, spend it as frequently as you might, was always to be found in the pocket. There must have been necromancy about it of some sort. According to natural history and all human experience, the advent of a caul without the interposition of a baby, is a thing im-

possible ; and yet, in the hands of Mr. Gurd, it was an event of frequent occurrence. How the conjure was effected was only known to Anthony and his sister, and must ever remain a mystery to the rest of the world. Diabolic incantations and sacrilegious spells doubtless entered into the process, as certainly did a very fine sort of gold-beater's skin and a delicate quality of glue, but in what proportion these various ingredients were blended is unknown. That it was a rapid process, however, may be fairly assumed, since on more than one occasion a customer had called while the little drawer was tenantless ; and in less than twenty minutes occupied by Mr. Gurd in dealing with gold-beater's skin and enchantment, a caul had been "raised" and sold, the price bagged, and the customer sent on his way rejoicing.

The pill and potion trade was not unremunerative, but the caul trade beat it hollow. Sailors from far and near, and intending voyagers to foreign shores, eager to provide against shipwreck, applied in such numbers in answer to the quack doctor's advertisement, that sometimes two

would-be purchasers of the precious article would appear at the shop counter at one and the same time ; which was awkward. Indeed, it was in order that such an embarrassing occurrence might be avoided that Mr. Gurd resorted on the evening in question to Mr. Tadger's coffee-house. It happened in this way. On the morning of that day a lad had appeared at the Old Fish Street establishment, bearing a message from his master, a Sunderland collier, to the effect that if the caul was not yet disposed of, he would call by and by with a view of buying it ; and scarcely had the apothecary prepared by his necromancy to meet the desires of his expected customer, when in came our young sailor, flush of money, with a story of how some months since his life had been in awful jeopardy in a wrecked merchantman, and that he had at that time resolved that the very first time a lucky windfall in the shape of ready money came to him he would effectually provide against a recurrence of such peril ; and that now the windfall had all unexpectedly happened, and if Mr. Gurd would produce the caul and mention its price, he,

the young sailor, would at once become its purchaser.

Such a proposition to Mr. Gurd was irresistible, while at the same time it was perplexing. At any moment the Sunderland captain might arrive, and it might not be so easy to put him off while another caul was conjured into existence, as it would be to put off this last eager customer.

"I have not the article in my possession," said he to the young sailor; "the child's mother thinks such a deal of it that she won't part with it till the last moment; but, if you really mean business, I'll go in the course of an hour and fetch it, and meet you with it."

"I am staying at Tadger's, in Wormwood Street," replied the sailor; "d'ye know it?"

Mr. Gurd knew Tadger's quite well; and that is how it came about that the shabby little old man and the sailor were discovered in the coffee-room at the time when Humphrey Dyot made his appearance there with his leather bag.

It was unfortunate for the speedy con-

summation of Mr. Gurd's business with his nautical client, that that gentleman did not proceed straight from the pill-shop to Tadger's, and there wait, as he said he would. Instead of which, by way of thanksgiving for the success of his mission, he gave his mind to the drinking of rum at every public-house that lay in his route; and when Mr. Gurd made his appearance, although his customer was pointed out by Mr. Tadger, his identification was not easy, owing to the circumstance of his being blissfully asleep, with his face on his arm, and nothing visible but his round tarpaulin hat. However, when Mr. Gurd made himself known, he roused a little, and offered Mr. Gurd refreshment, and paid for it; and then begged that gentleman's permission to indulge in five minutes' doze, when he promised to be as right as nine-pence and in fit condition to do business; which explanation brings us neck-and-neck with the conclusion of the last chapter.

"Come away out of this! I ain't afraid of any living man; but I can't stand ghosts!" And, so exclaiming, the sailor

caught up his hat in such a hurry as to capsize that of Mr. Gurd, who had great difficulty in saving it and the speckled cotton handkerchief within it from falling to the ground—which would have been a pity, since, wrapped in the handkerchief was the object of barter that had brought the men together.

“Confound the man!” exclaimed Doctor Gurd, barely saving his property, “what’s the matter with you? Sit down, you foolish fellow; you’ve been dreaming.”

“What d’ye mean? Dreaming!” replied Billy Hogan (whom the reader may remember as the spokesman of the crew of the ill-fated East-Indiaman “Reaper,” and who, as the Fates willed it, was a lodger in the same house with the man whom he and his shipmates had consigned to death by drowning on the wrecked ship). “What d’ye mean by telling a fellow that he’s dreaming?” demanded Billy, in an indignant whisper; “didn’t *you* see him?”

“See whom? I saw nobody but the customer that just came in,” replied Mr. Gurd.

"Didn't you hear him speak? Didn't you see him pass through that doorway not a minute ago?"

"To be sure I did. A tall, thin man, carrying a black bag, first over his shoulder and then under his arm," replied Mr. Gurd, testily. "D'ye know him?"

"I did know him; but he's been dead this year a'most," answered Mr. Hogan, his mouth twitching nervously, as he bent over the quack doctor to impart this startling intelligence.

"You don't say so!" observed Mr. Gurd, affecting an indifference he was far from experiencing. "If this isn't a case of delirium tremens, induced by excessive indulgence in rum, it's odd to me," said the doctor to himself.

"Yes!" continued the affrighted seaman, cowering still closer to Anthony as though for protection against the ghost, that at any moment might re-appear. "I saw the last of that man just eleven months ago; saw the last of him, Mr. Doctor, as surely as though I had stitched him in his hammock and shotted his feet."

"You thought that you saw the last of

him on the occasion you refer to," replied Mr. Gurd, in persuasive tones; "but of course it was nothing of the kind, since here he is, carrying his luggage and ordering tea and mutton chops. Sit down like a good fellow, and we will complete our little business. I have an engagement at seven, and now it is nearly six." And he withdrew from his fob an old-fashioned, massive gold watch—anything but the watch of a poor man—in corroboration of his assertion.

"Mad with fever! Drifting all alone on a ship that hadn't an hour's life left in her—that never was heard of afterwards! The ship at the bottom of the sea, and he still a live man, and in this house along o' me!" ejaculated Billy Hogan, not heeding a single word of his companion's last observation, but staring with wide open eyes at the doorway through which the spectre had vanished.

"A hallucination, my friend; nothing but a hallucination," remarked Mr. Gurd, soothingly.

"Was it, doctor?" whispered Billy, eagerly catching at the suggestion, and

thankful that the horrid mystery admitted of explanation of any sort. "Is that what it was?"

"Undoubtedly. What else could it have been?" replied the doctor, relieved that his client showed symptoms of returning to reason. "It is singular that a shrewd; sensible fellow as you evidently are—and a brave fellow, too, as I'll warrant you to be—should believe in the possibility of departed spirits returning to earth."

Billy was puzzled.

"What d'ye call them other things, then, that *do* return and walk the earth, if they ain't dead men's ghosts?" he asked.

"What things?"

"The things with the long name that you just mentioned, the hally——"

"Hallucination do you mean?"

"That's him," exclaimed Billy.

"My good friend, you don't quite comprehend my meaning, I'm afraid," explained Mr. Gurd; "what I meant was, that you were labouring under a mistake; that owing to some striking similarity existing between this stranger and your defunct friend, his identification——"

"I don't understand a bit what you are talking about," remarked Billy, bewilderedly.

"The short of it is, then," said Mr. Gurd, "the man who just came in is simply very much like your dead friend, but it isn't him at all."

But Billy was not to be convinced. The last time he saw that face the moon was shining on it, and it wore an expression he was likely never to forget; the last time he had heard that voice its tones and its entreaty had conveyed so thrilling a sense of shame and reproach to Billy's conscience, and rent it so badly, that a short eleven months were far insufficient for its healing.

"You may talk," exclaimed he, rising, and putting on his hat with a firm hand; "anyhow, let us get out of this haunted house. I'd give a crown for a drink of rum, if it was handy, this minute," said Billy, with a shiver, and buttoning his jacket as he spoke.

Mr. Gurd began to grow uneasy as to the business that had brought him away from home. Unless the bargain was completed before his sailor customer took to

drowning his fears in rum, there was a strong probability of its falling through altogether.

"I shouldn't object to a small glass myself. I'll stand treat when the affair we have in hand is settled," said he.

"What affair d'ye mean?" asked Mr. Hogan.

"Why, the caul, my dear sir. After much persuasion, I prevailed on the mother——"

"Hang the caul!" interrupted Billy, irreverently; "I'm past cauls now. Cauls won't stave off ghosts."

"Oh! indeed, sir! And pray where did you make that discovery?" inquired Mr. Gurd, desperately.

But Mr. Hogan's thoughts were wandering.

"D'ye think it possible, doctor, that—that it isn't the same?" he remarked in a whisper.

"What! the caul?" replied Mr. Gurd, laying his hand on the speckled handkerchief. "My dear friend, you may take my word——"

"No, no! I mean, do you think that

I might be mistaken as to him?" And Billy nodded towards the distant doorway.

"I think it impossible that it can be any other way," replied Mr. Gurd. "Why, look here, now; there's a way of putting the matter beyond doubt in a moment. You know your friend's name, I suppose?"

"I should know it if anyone was to mention it," said Billy, with a sheepish look. "He didn't go by his reg'lar name the little while he was with us; we used to call him all manner of names, and some of 'em not over civil ones, the more shame for us."

"But what was it like? Was it a short name or a long name?"

"It was a short name. There was a 'y' in it. It was Dy—Dy——no, it wasn't Dyer. It wasn't far short of Dyer, though."

"That's enough. Mr. Tadger can put us right now, I'll warrant." And the doctor beckoned the coffee-house keeper, who by this time had once more retired to his box at the end of the long room.

But just as Mr. Tadger rose to comply,

the public door was swung open and in came a man, wiping his forehead with the sleeve of his jacket, as though recently relieved of a load.

"Luggage for a gentleman," said the porter. "Big box and little un."

"What name?" asked Mr. Tadger.

"I've got it here somewhere," replied the porter; and as he spoke he advanced to the compartment where Mr. Gurd and the sailor sat, and where, on the table, stood two lighted candles. "I've got it somewhere here," said the porter, fumbling at some loose papers in an inner pocket. "Ah! here it is; I ain't much of a reader myself. What name does it say, shipmate?" And he gave the paper into the hands of Mr. William Hogan. The sailor glanced at it merely, and then, dropping it as though it had been a hot coal, cried out as he started up on to his legs—

"Bust me, if I shan't be tortured to death if I stay here any longer! Clear the gangway, some of you; I'll have no more of it."

But the passage was narrow, and the

porter was bulky, and a man of a mould to resist unceremonious shoving.

"You're werry easy tortured, mister!" exclaimed the porter; "I'm werry glad as I can't read, if it hurts as much as that;" and he tauntingly stood in Mr. Hogan's path.

"Dyot is the name," observed Mr. Gurd, who had picked up the paper; "Mr. Humphrey Dyot."

"That's me," exclaimed a voice coming from the stairs; "the luggage I am expecting, as I told you, Mr. Tadger. Here's an extra sixpence for you, porter."

This was at the same time lucky and unlucky for the porter; for if Mr. Dyot had not have been coming down from his room at that identical moment he would have been sixpence out of pocket; and, since it happened that he was coming down at that identical moment, the porter was knocked down. Reading the name on the paper was bad enough, but supplemented by the sound of the voice, and of the approaching footsteps of the mysterious man himself, it was altogether too much for Billy Hogan, and, with a desperate cry,

knocking down the opposing porter at a blow, he leapt over his body, and quitted the shop and was out of sight in an instant.

"That's a fine start! What does he mean by that?" exclaimed Mr. Tadger, appealing to the herb doctor.

"Do you know the man?" inquired Mr. Dyot.

"He is a lodger here, sir," answered Mr. Tadger; "lodged here since last Tuesday."

"What was the matter with him, old gentleman?"

"That's drink, sir, that is," replied Mr. Gurd, who began to think that he had best get away as quickly as possible. "I never saw him as bad as that before, though." And, with a rueful countenance, he folded the speckled handkerchief back into his hat, and placed the latter on his head.

"What's it to do with me about his drinking? Ain't I going to get nothing for being hit down like that? Come, you're his friend, and you've got to settle it." This was the porter, whose blunt nose looked none the handsomer now that it was painted red.

"Of course I will," said Mr. Gurd, nervously, and at the same time gathering up the change out of the sailor's sovereign, that still lay on the table. "Here is half-a-crown, my good fellow, which he shall pay me back the very next time we meet."

And, pocketing the remainder of the money, Mr. Gurd nodded to Mr. Tadger, and bowed to the mysterious stranger—a prolonged bow, accompanied by a steady gaze—and then took his departure.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE READER AND MISS MERCY GURD
ARE MADE ACQUAINTED.

WHETHER Mr. Gurd experienced a further disappointment by reason of the Sunderland collier captain not making his appearance according to the message delivered by his boy, or whether after his sudden exit from Tadger's and between that point and his own home he encountered wherewith to vex and chafe him, does not appear; but if ever a man besoured in face and temper sat down to breakfast, that man was the pill-doctor on the morning following the events detailed in the preceding chapter.

On the contrary, his sister Mercy was in the best of spirits; which was fortunate for her, as first impressions go a long way, and this is the first occasion of her being brought under the reader's notice. She

was an altogether different person from her brother Anthony, being at least five inches taller, and of flat, square build. She had large bony hands, and high cheek-bones, and a large chin, surmounted by a pair of lips as thin and cold-looking as the steel hinges of a surgical instrument case. The expression of her eyes was the same as her brother's—but they were blue, and her heavy eyebrows were russet instead of dark brown. Having no natural hair to speak of, in public she wore a wig, a ruddy-brown wig, with tight little corkscrew curls at the sides; in private life, however—strictly private life, that is, to the mysteries of which no living soul, except her brother Anthony and old Mrs. Chinery, down stairs, were allowed to penetrate—she wore a frilled nightcap of ample dimensions and tied under her chin. She was younger than Anthony, though to see her in her nightcap the fact would never be suspected, and was altogether more manly and vigorous. It was over the breakfast-table that the worthy couple were accustomed to exchange notes of the proceedings of the day before.

a hundred and seventy pounds were the terms, I believe."

"For three years, or less in the event of its decease. I've got the terms by heart, as well as in black and white, never fear," replied Miss Gurd.

"And how old was it when it went off?" asked her brother.

"Seven months; seven months and six days."

"But Mother Craven won't charge for the odd days. Surely, the rapacious old witch won't charge for more than the last month, which is a pound; that is all that is owing, I believe, Mercy?" inquired Mr. Gurd, indignant at the mere suspicion of Mrs. Craven's mercenary behaviour. "She doesn't say anything about the odd days in her letter, my love."

"She makes nine pounds of it altogether," replied Miss Gurd, taking the letter out of her bosom again.

"Makes what? Who cares what she makes it? *How* does she make it? that's the question," exclaimed Mr. Gurd, snapping at his sister as though, in his indignation he saw Mrs. Craven's face beneath the

frills of her nightcap. "How does she make it? come now."

Mercy opened the letter.

"One month's pay and six days over, one pound four and sixpence!" read Mercy.

"Wrong to start!" promptly remarked Mr. Anthony, dipping the end of his spoon in the coffee-cup and making a memorandum on the breakfast-tray, "one four and fourpence-halfpenny, if you please, Mrs. Craven; go on, dear."

"Doctor, three days' attendance, seven and sixpence."

"And quite enough too! Go on."

"Burial, two pounds fifteen."

"Two pounds fifteen!—that's very high, isn't it, Mercy?"

"Here's the undertaker's bill, so I suppose it's all right," his sister answered.

"Well, well, we must all live, I suppose," said Mr. Gurd, with a sigh that betokened that the supposition was not highly relishing. "How are we going on next? Two fifteen, and seven and six, and one, four, fourpence-halfpenny, that only makes

four, seven, and fourpence-halfpenny out of nine pounds. Go on, my love."

"Physic for baby, four pounds twelve and six," read Miss Mercy.

"Four pounds twelve and sixpence for—for physic!" exclaimed Mr. Gurd; "why, the woman must be mad. What do *you* think, my dear?"

Miss Mercy looked at her brother and shrugged her shoulders significantly.

"She is high; but she isn't a bungler, that's one comfort, Tony. Whatever she undertakes she goes through with without fuss or bother."

"So she does—so she does," said Anthony, musingly, twiddling the undertaker's certificate, which he had again taken in hand, against the side of his nose. "She is a very discreet person, a very trustworthy person, and"—here Mr. Gurd with the end of the folded burial-certificate obliterated the figures standing in coffee on the tray—"and so I suppose we must pay the bill and say no more about it."

This little business settled, Mr. Gurd was in much better humour, and not only consented to try the bacon which Miss

Mercy, with her own fair fingers and the aid of a table-fork, had re-heated, but also to have his cup filled again; and while he discussed these viands he gave his sister an account of his singular interview with the young sailor at Mr. Tadger's coffee-house, with its peculiarly unsatisfactory termination.

"Ah! well, it can't be helped," said his sister, soothingly. "There's worse misfortunes at sea, in spite of caul's, eh, my dear?" And the amiable lady chuckled over her little seasonable joke.

"But, really, I did blunder, you know," remarked Mr. Gurd. "What I should have done——. Come in, Chinery!"

"Please, sir, there's a man down-stairs says as he wants to see you on particular business," responded Chinery, putting her ancient and grimy face in at the door.

"Six to ten p.m., tell him, Mrs. Chinery. He might have known that if he had taken the trouble to read one of our bills."

"I told him it was from six to ten, please, sir; but he wouldn't take it as an answer. 'I shall anchor here till he comes

on deck,' he said; and with that he sat down on the shop-chair."

"Umph! That's what he said, eh? He's a sailor, then, Chinery?"

"Name of Hogan, sir, William Hogan."

"O-o-h-h!" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, looking as though he was pretty equally balanced between annoyance and satisfaction by the news of his visitor's call. "My dear, it must be the young man we were just speaking of," he whispered to Mercy. "Shall I see him?"

"Why not? P'r'aps he means buying the caul, after all; anyhow, you can be nothing out of pocket by seeing him."

"Excepting that seventeen shillings I told you of, my love; p'r'aps he has called for that," remarked Mr. Gurd, dubiously.

"Nonsense! You can manage that if he has come on any such ridiculous business, I'm sure," replied his sister, encouragingly.

"There's no fire in the consulting-room. Shall I have him up here, my love. You will have no objection to retiring to your room for a few minutes; the interview won't last longer, I dare say."

The room leading out of the breakfast apartment was the one Miss Mercy called her own, and thither she retired while Mrs. Chinery ushered up Mr. William Hogan. He was sober enough now evidently, though, judging from his anxious face, not at all comfortable in his mind.

"Glad to see you, my dear sir," said Mr. Gurd. "May the evening's amusement bear, etc.,—eh? I never, in my life, met such a set of rollicking dogs as you sailors!"

Of all creatures in creation Billy Hogan looked decidedly less like a rollicking dog than anything else as, with a haggard face, he gave blithe Mr. Gurd his limp hand to shake.

"I've had a hell of a night of it, doctor," said William Hogan. "I always do when I drink past getting drunk; that's what I did after I left you last night."

"And fell into bad company and lost all your money, I suppose?" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, looking as blank almost as Billy Hogan himself.

"I might have done if I could have got drunk, but I couldn't, don't I tell you.

Drank, and drank, and drank, but couldn't manage it nohow. I thought it precious hard lines then; but I see now that it was all for the best. Good Lord! suppose I *had* got too fuddled to know what I was doing and lost all my money—the money for *that* and all!"

"Well, it would have been very awkward," remarked Mr. Gurd, rubbing his hands and brightening considerably after hearing Billy Hogan's last speech; "under all circumstances, it would have been very awkward, I must say."

"I can't get him from before my eyes, you know, that's where it is," said Mr. Hogan; "that second look at him that I got last night settled my business, doctor."

"It went towards settling the porter's business as well," replied Mr. Gurd, smiling in expectancy as he observed the sailor's hand plunged into his money-pocket.

"What about a porter?"

"The man that brought the boxes. Don't you recollect the man you knocked down in the passage?"

But Billy Hogan, nervously untying his money-bag with his teeth, only shook his head vaguely.

"I dare say, if he stood in my way; but don't recollect it in the least. Them eyes of his would have drove me through a brick wall, I verily believe, if one had been there to stop me. How much is the caul to be, doctor?"

Five pounds was the sum Mr. Gurd had, in his own mind, fixed on when Billy Hogan first applied to him. In the course of their conversation on the previous evening, he had raised it to six. Seeing the condition of mind the poor young man was in this morning, the price went up a pound higher still.

"Seven pounds won't hurt you, will it?" said he, benevolently.

"Seventy, if I had as much, wouldn't hurt me so much as another night like last," replied Billy Hogan, passing his hand across his forehead. "Let me have it at once, please, if it is handy."

It was handy enough, and in less than five minutes was safe in the recesses of the pocket-book of the superstitious young

fellow, while his seven pounds found secure harbour in the pill-doctor's cash-box.

"And now that business is settled," cried Mr. Gurd, liberally producing a decanter of rum and two glasses. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me how this strange affair that troubles you so came about—unless it's a secret, in which case I should be sorry——"

"It's no secret at all," interrupted Billy Hogan, fortified by the precious pressure of the pocket-book against his bosom; "I'll tell you all about it, and gladly."

And so he did. All about the strange fever that fell on the man that brought ill-luck with him aboard the "Reaper;" all about the storm, and the wreck, and the escape of the crew in the boat, and leaving the stricken man to die. All about the "precious charge" Captain Crosbie had intrusted the mate with, did Billy Hogan relate; and how that it was inadvertently left on board after all; with Captain Crosbie's exclamation that he was indeed a ruined man, and that a hundred fortunes such as his would not cover the loss; and the rest of it.

"And he was seen waving the jacket over his head, was he?" remarked Mr. Gurd.

"Round and round, as though it was of no more value than an old pot-swab," replied Mr. Hogan.

"Then it tumbled out of the pocket, no doubt," observed Mr. Gurd. "My dear friend, if you and I had but a millionth of the riches the sea hides, we should be well off, eh? Good morning! Take care of your bargain; you'll never be able to buy such another."

Great was Mr. Gurd's astonishment, on returning up-stairs from letting Billy Hogan out, to find himself suddenly seized by his sister Mercy, and straightway marched to a chair.

"Sit down there, Tony," said she, "and repeat to me all that you told me at breakfast about what you saw, and who you saw, and what you heard at Tadger's last night."

CHAPTER V.

MISS GURD TAKES NOTES.

It was evident that Miss Gurd (thanks to the thinness of the partition that divided the breakfast-room from that lady's boudoir), having as fair opportunity as her brother of hearing the conversation that had recently transpired between the latter and Billy Hogan, had taken even more interest therein than he had. Indeed, so deeply did the narrative impress her, that she was moved to take notes of it by means of a blacklead pencil and the unwritten side of Mrs. Craven's letter as the means handiest. Bursting on Anthony, she carried her notes in one hand, and, requiring the other to effect his seizure, the pencil stump was stuck in her mouth short-pipe-wise, considerably aggravating

the oddity of her appearance and behaviour.

"Why, what's the matter, my love?" exclaimed Anthony, in mild remonstrance, as he disengaged himself from his partner's bony grasp. "It's all right, as you must have understood, if you have been listening. He paid down his money——"

"It isn't about him or his money that I want you to tell me," interrupted Miss Mercy, impatiently. "He may either drown or hang for all that it concerns us; but about this other affair, that's what I want to hear."

"About *which* other affair?" inquired Anthony, eyeing his sister in amazement.

"About which! Why, about this Humphrey Dyot, and his luggage, and his looks, and his manner, and—and—all about him." And, planting herself in a chair immediately before her brother, Mercy spread Mrs. Craven's letter blank side uppermost on the table, and whittled the pencil between her teeth impatiently, all in readiness for further note-taking, should occasion require.

Although at present quite in the dark

as to what his sister's aim was, Mr. Gurd dutifully complied with his sister's peremptory mandate, interrupted occasionally, when she held up her finger as a sign for him to pause, while she made a note. On such occasions he had to undergo the further ordeal of cross-examination.

"A large leather valise, I think you said, Tony?" remarked the lady, referring to her notes.

"And a large box covered with canvas, and a little deal box, brought in by the porter, who——"

"Bother!" exclaimed Miss Mercy, "who said a word about boxes. About the bag. How big was it?"

"Well, it might hold such a thing as a couple of suits of clothes," answered Anthony, meekly. "It might be made to hold more, perhaps, well packed. A pair of Wellington boots or so, and shaving tackle, my dear."

"But did it *look* as though it contained what you mention?" said Miss Mercy, impatiently.

"Really, my love," began Anthony, in a tone of appeal, "how is it possible——"

"Was it flat or square, bulgy or smooth?" snapped Miss Mercy.

"It wasn't bulgy; I'll take an oath that it wasn't bulgy!" answered the poor witness, nervously. "There was something hard and square in it, and I'll tell you why I know that, my love. When Mr. Tadger hooked it off the end of his stick he rested it for a moment on the ground, which was dusty, I suppose, for when the stranger took possession of it again and raised it up, there was the square sharp-edged mark where it had touched the dust."

"It might have contained a box, then?" suggested Miss Mercy, musingly.

"Decidedly it might have contained a box," returned Mr. Gurd, promptly. "It might have been a dressing-case, only that he looked too poor a fellow to possess such a luxury."

"But you said that it was heavy," said Mercy, sharply, and referring to her notes in consternation, "a dressing case isn't very heavy, you know, Tony."

"He carried it as though it were heavy,

when he came in with it slung over his shoulder. Mr. Tadger said that it was heavy; yes, that is right, Mercy."

"That's the strangest part of it, as I take it," observed Miss Gurd, leaning back in her chair, and tucking her thumbs in at the girdle-cord of her morning robe, as a man occasionally tucks his thumbs in at his waistcoat armholes. "I'd very much rather have heard that he came in hugging it up in his arms, as he hugged it when he took it away from the coffee-house keeper."

"Would you?" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, opening wider his already amazed eyes; "and why would you?"

"Because it would have assorted better with the rest of his behaviour, stupid, wouldn't it?—with his anxiety respecting it, with his careful carriage of it, and with his questions as to the secure fastening of his bed-room door?"

"To be sure," observed Mr. Anthony; not that the remark meant or was intended to convey anything, only his sister at this point made a pause, and it was necessary to say something by way of showing his

interest : "To be sure, I never thought of that."

"You never think of anything that doesn't come with a rap on the side of your head," said his polite sister. "Perhaps I shall see my way clearer when I've considered it over quietly for an hour or so ; but, at present, what bothers me most is this—if this precious charge was so small as to be contained within the dimensions of a sandwich-box, how comes it now to make a load filling out a large valise ? and, admitting that miracle, how is it to be accounted for that, while in the street, where he was most likely to be robbed of it, he just slings it at the end of his stick, as a tramp slings his trumpery bundle ? That's what puzzles me, Anthony, my love."

Anthony, my love, being hitherto all unconscious that there was any puzzle at all about the business, elevated his eyebrows gradually as his sister proceeded with her last speech, until, by the time she arrived at the end of it, they were drawn up so high that it seemed doubtful if they would ever come down any more ; while

his eyes expanded and gasped their amazement in a series of rapid winks. It was at least twenty seconds ere he could find speech.

"So *that's* the way the wind blows, eh?" said he, softly, at the same time regarding his sister with an admiration almost amounting to reverence. "Father will never be dead while you live, Mercy, my dear."

"It's as clear as water in a well up to a certain point," resumed Miss Gurd, not seeming to heed the compliment. "Firstly, the sandwich-box in which the captain deposited his precious charge, whatever it was, was a tight fit for the jacket-pocket, and did *not* slip out when the man left behind on board the wreck waved it above his head. Secondly, the poor fellow finding himself starved with cold through coming out of his hot fever-bed up on to the drenched deck, nothing was more natural than that he should put on the great warm jacket, and, consequently that he should discover the treasure in the pocket of it. And, thirdly, having made the discovery, it follows, as a matter of course, that when, by

some miracle or another, he escaped off the wreck, he should take mighty good care of the treasure, and keep it about him ; and, further, that he should be particularly anxious not to let it out of his safe keeping now that he has got back to England. Then comes the puzzle. He is not new from the ship that brought him over, for, as you heard, he has been lodging at Rat-cliff ; therefore he has had time to do better with his treasure, either by converting it into ready money or planting it somewhere, than to carry it about with him ; but he *does* carry it about with him—slung over his shoulder at the end of his hooked stick, of all things in the world !”

“ What do you imagine the treasure to consist of ?” asked her brother.

“ Something not easily convertible ; something that, in the hands of a simple sailor, would be of no more use to him probably than a bag of cherry-stones.”

“ Jewels, may be !” suggested Anthony.

His sister shrugged her shoulders.

“ That don’t account for the leather bag and its heavy contents,” said she. “ A handful of diamonds set in a sandwich-box

won't grow into a big bagful in the course of a year."

"I tell you what," exclaimed Mr. Gurd, after half a minute of profound reflection ; "I'll find out this Billy Hogan again ; and, through him, if possible, come at other of the fellows who were aboard the ' Reaper ' at the time of the wreck. We may get at a clue to the mystery that way. What do you think of that plan, Mercy ?"

"Why not try and find out the captain himself, and tell him all about it ?" suggested Miss Mercy, in doubtful tones, as she frowningly re-perused her "notes."

"But do you think that an advisable plan, dear ?" returned Mr. Anthony. "If nothing else can be done, of course it will be our duty to seek out the captain and tell him all about it ; but would it be quite safe to——"

"Is it quite safe, or at all safe, to open one's lips to an idiot ?" fiercely interrupted his sister.

"I should say not, my dear, if matters of importance were involved," replied Mr. Anthony, meekly. "At the same time, if

your unkind insinuation is levelled at me——”

“Bah! you’re very good at carrying, but as to finding and fetching you’ve no more capacity than a poodle,” once more interrupted the irascible lady.

“Ten to one but that it’s a mare’s nest, after all,” grumbled Mr. Anthony, who was growing weary of being badgered.

“Mare’s nest or other, it’s worth looking up,” replied his sister. “As to what it may yield if it should turn out to be a real snug nest with golden eggs, of course depends on how it is approached. I should have thought that yours was just the right kind of hand for such nesting, Tony.”

“Well, well, we’ll see about it,” answered her brother, mollified by this last little compliment.

That same morning, attired with unusual neatness, Mr. Gurd made his way to an old-fashioned coffee-house in the City, where newspapers were filed, and soon was busy poring over a batch that were eleven months old, or thereabout. For a considerable time his countenance wore a dissatisfied aspect, but suddenly it lighted up as

though some internal illuminating machinery had suddenly been set in motion, and he uttered aloud an ejaculation that arrested the attention of the waiter that happened to be passing.

"Did you call, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes," answered Mr. Anthony, with recovered self-possession; "bring me another sixpenn'orth of pale brandy with warm water."

And sipping his liquor with a relish, Mr. Gurd read and re-read the paragraph in the old newspaper that afforded him such great delight. His object evidently was to get it by heart, for, as he perused a few lines, he would shut his eyes, and, under his breath, endeavour to repeat them. After several unsuccessful attempts, however, he gave it up as a hopeless task, and furtively watching the waiter until his back was turned, he noiselessly perpetrated the trifling larceny of tearing out the paragraph and stowed it in his waistcoat pocket.

Leaving this place, he did not immediately return home. Such appeared to be his intention at starting, for he turned his

face in the direction of Old Fish Street ; but he presently altered his mind, and, taking another road, he made towards Bishopsgate. Arrived at Wormwood Street, Mr. Gurd waylaid a small boy of decent appearance, evidently an errand-boy of the neighbourhood, and by a promise of sixpence induced him to step down as far as Tadger's coffee-house, and inquire if a gentleman named Dyot was still there resident ; and within five minutes was in possession of the satisfactory intelligence that such was the case.

Mercy was from home when he returned to Old Fish Street, but presently she made her appearance attired in a black gown and a particularly sober bonnet ; for she had been to inform the sorrow-stricken gentleman who had confided little Osborne to her charge, of the child's untimely death. The sorrow-stricken gentleman's grief was so excessive that it took a hysterical turn ; when the full weight of the dismal news, crowned with the production of the undertaker's certificate, came on him, he skipped from off his office-stool, crying,

“ Dear me ! You don't say so ! ” at the

same time briskly rubbing his hands and making a noise that sounded like chuckling.

"It is too true," replied Miss Gurd, shaking her head sadly; "so unexpected you see, sir!"

"Unexpected! I never experienced anything so unexpected in all my life, my dear ma'am," replied the professional gentleman, with a return of the hysteric chuckle. "However, these melancholy affairs are always best dismissed from the mind as soon as possible, ma'am, in my opinion," said he; "and therefore I will give you at once a cheque for the amount due to you." And so he did.

"I'm so glad that you've come home, my dear," exclaimed Anthony, placing a chair by the fire for his sister. "I've got something to show you, my love, that I think will astonish you."

"So have I; and I'll back my something against yours any day," returned Miss Mercy; and, with an air of calm triumph, she produced the lawyer's cheque and showed it to her brother.

"What do you think of that, my little

Toey? Shouldn't I have won if you had wagered?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I don't know," replied Anthony, caressing the cheque, and toying with its crispness. "Upon my word, my dear, I am not quite sure about that. Mind you, if anyone was to say to me, 'Will you take the sum of one hundred and forty-two pounds ten shillings for your chance, Mr. Gurd?' I think it possible that I might be induced to comply; and I might comply, and be sorry for it, my love."

Miss Mercy looked as though she did not altogether relish this depreciation of her trump card.

"Well, let us see this wonder of yours," said she. "It should be something worth seeing; you make talk enough over it."

"It's in paper, my love, as yours is," observed Anthony, as he withdrew from his waistcoat pocket the scrap of newspaper he had purloined in the morning. "I'll read it to you, if you have no objection. Ahem!"

"News has just reached Liverpool of the wreck and abandonment of the mer-

chantman, 'Reaper,' Captain Crosbie, on her voyage from Shanghai to London; all hands saved but one, who was left dying of fever, on board the ill-fated ship. The 'Reaper,' and her cargo, which consisted of tea and silks, was fully insured. Not so, however, a case of jewels, said to be of enormous value, intrusted to the care of the captain to convey to England that they might have the advantage of European setting, and which, by accident, was left aboard."

"Have you made any move yet?" inquired Miss Gurd, after she had taken the newspaper paragraph in her own hands, and perused it attentively.

Anthony informed her of the few steps he had taken; after which the worthy couple laid their precious heads together and passed quite a pleasant evening concocting a trap to catch Captain Crosbie's lost case of diamonds.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. GURD PAYS A SECOND VISIT TO WORMWOOD STREET.

MR. TADGER was from home, and Micah, his waiter, was left in charge. Being new to his present service, and evidently such an exceedingly simple young man, Mr. Tadger had considered it necessary, ere he took his departure, to impress on his servant the desirability of his conducting himself with propriety towards the customers, neither offering nor accepting undue familiarities, but remaining in his own department, never issuing therefrom unless to take orders or the money for them. And Micah, with childlike innocence and a guileless shake of his head, assured his master that even had he refrained from opening his mouth on the subject, the course advised was the one he should have pursued exactly. It may as

well here be stated, in order that the reader may not be imposed on as honest Mr. Tadger was, that Micah the waiter, was a humbug of the first water, cunning as a rat, and with much of that animal's nature in him, being unscrupulous enough where there was no danger, and to any extent vile in a paltry way. He was big enough to be a strong rogue, and had a fist that, with a bludgeon in it, would have told heavily against an honest man's life; so, after all, it is likely that his fellow-creatures as well as himself had reason to be thankful that cowardice ruled him.

As soon as Mr. Gurd entered the coffee-room (he was on this occasion even better dressed than when he went hunting amongst the old newspaper files) it happened that no other customer was there, and as he put his head in at the door, Micah recognized it at once; but as Mr. Gurd took possession of a box and rung the bell, had the pill-doctor come straight from the Pyramids, Micah, by his imperturbable countenance, could not have betrayed a more complete ignorance of who his customer might be.

"I wish to see Mr. Tadger: is he in?" inquired Mr. Anthony, blandly.

"He is not, sir," replied Micah, with profound civility, though all the while speculating in his own mind whether the sailor, William Hogan by name, ever received his change out of the sovereign that the old gentleman present had taken charge of. "Mr. Tadger is not in, sir; he is not expected to return until late this evening."

"Humph! that's unlucky," grumbled Mr. Gurd. "Bring me a cup of chocolate."

Micah returned with the chocolate presently.

"Are you left in charge of the business, young man?" Anthony inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"In sole charge, does that mean, of the whole establishment?" and as he spoke, Mr. Gurd waved his spoon in an upward direction by way of intimating that he meant the rooms overhead.

"When Mr. Tadger goes out, sir, I officiate for him entirely," replied Micah with an affable smirk. "Is there any message I can deliver from you to Mr. Tadger when he returns?"

"You can tell him that I called, and that I will look in again in the morning."

"What name, sir?"

"Never mind the name; you've seen me here before, haven't you?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir," replied Micah, with an unruffled countenance; "I haven't been here very long, sir—not more than ten weeks; so perhaps it was before my time when you were here last."

"Ah! well, it doesn't matter, young man; you needn't mention about my calling at all, now I come to think of it. Bring me another lump of sugar; you can afford to sweeten your chocolate, I should think, charging sixpence a cup."

"The man's a fool," said Mr. Gurd, grinning to himself, soon as Micah's back was turned. "He doesn't recollect me! Why, he has served me half a dozen times. By the by; I wonder if Mr. Hogan altered his mind after all, and came back here to lodge? That's a point worth settling, and I can get it out of this idiot where, perhaps I couldn't out of Tadger."

"How's business," asked Anthony of Micah, the waiter, as that person appeared with the sugar lump.

"Very fair, sir."

"House full?"

"Pretty well, sir."

"Ah! I know the time when this establishment *was* an establishment," said Mr. Gurd, affably; "when none but tip-top customers used it. No common sailor fellows found a lodging here then, I assure you, young man."

"We don't often have 'em now, sir. None at present, anyhow."

"Indeed! All private folks, eh?"

"Can't say that, sir. They look private enough, sir."

"Ah!" And Mr. Gurd took up the newspaper and spread it before him, as a sign that at present he had nothing further to say.

"He's as easy to suck as an orange!" was Mr. Gurd's mental ejaculation. "All right in that direction, then. Mr. Hogan has taken himself off!" But the quiet grin induced by this comfortable conclusion gradually expired on Anthony's face, giving place to a most sober and serious expression. For fully two minutes he stared at the newspaper, without reading a word of it, and then said to himself, softly,

"Why not? It would be a splendid thing to polish off the whole business at a single stroke. Unless he's one of those ridiculous honest idiots that serve their masters as dogs do, and brag of it, I think it may be managed. It is departing a little from our plan; but if I can accomplish at once all that the tedious working of a plan could do, it must be profitable." He looked carefully over the top of his box to make sure that no other customer had as yet come in, and then he touched the bell for Micah's attendance.

"If I understood you rightly, I think, young man, that you said that you had sole control here while your master was away—sole control."

"Quite right, sir," answered Micah, calmly, though wondering all the while what the clever old gentleman was driving at.

"You know all about the lodgers and their ways, eh?"

"Just as much as Mr. Tadger himself, sir. Do you require a bed-room or sitting-room, sir?"

"Not exactly." And then, unbuttoning

his coat and thrusting a finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, continued Mr. Gurd, putting into practice his best idea of a winning smile.

"Young man, may I make a confidant of you?"

"If you please to do so, sir. I trust I am not capable of betraying a person who did so, sir; I'd scorn the action."

"The truth is this, then: when I asked concerning the people who are now staying here, it was not out of idle curiosity. I am in search of a gentleman whom I have reason to believe is a lodger in this house."

"What name, if you please, sir?"

"Ah! that's where it is, young man," replied Mr. Gurd, shaking his head, dubiously. "It is impossible to say under what name it might enter his whimsical head to pass. He is a little damaged here, poor gentleman," and, with a sigh, Mr. Gurd touched his forehead with his forefinger.

Micah shook his head commiseratingly.

"Should you know his proper name if you heard it, sir?" asked Micah.

"Well enough," answered Anthony.

"Is it Carter, sir?"

"No."

"Or Chesterton?"

"No."

"Or Dyot?" Stooping to pick up the towel that he dropped at this moment, a grin overspread Micah's face, that would have made Mr. Gurd uneasy had he seen it.

"That name seems familiar to me somehow," remarked Mr. Gurd. "What sort of person is Mr. Dyot?"

"Why might you want to know, sir?" asked the simple Micah.

"Look you here, young man," said Anthony, at the same time exhibiting the finger and thumb that all this time had reposed in the pocket, with a guinea between; "the simple fact is, I am a medical man acting in behalf of this poor gentleman's friends. The information I seek from you it is worth my while to pay you for. Will you describe the sort of person this Mr. Dyot is, and where he comes from?"

"From Ratcliff; only been here four days, sir," replied Micah, with edifying promptitude.

"Maybe; well?"

“A tall, dark man with a large
shoulders.”

“That’s like him. But”
“Quiet, nervous person.”

spoken, and somewhat

“Precisely?” “Yes, very much.”
“Nothing more, except that?”

particular about his appearance?”

“What does his figure look like?”
“Two lines and a half.”

“Bag, sir. He looks like a bag.”
“him, sir, I do believe.”

“Exaggerate?” “No, sir, I am not.”
“strong in character?”

“but affecting rather”
“and enough to show”

for that, surely.” “Yes, sir, I am not.”
“really more than a”

“had with him, sir?” “Yes, sir, I am not.”
“young man, very”

“no joking.”

“There is a”
“sir,” answered

towards the”
“say in fact, perhaps”

“for: but as the”
“myself”

“When was that, pray?”

“No longer than a few hours ago, sir. I took up his shaving-water, and, happening to cast my eye at the keyhole, there I saw it, sir, within a foot of his face; and, though he was asleep, his hand was on the handles of it.”

To do him justice, up to this time Mr. Gurd had controlled his excited feelings in a manner that would have won the admiration of his sister Mercy even; but this last item of intelligence conveyed to him by Micah was too much for his self-possession. With an exclamation of delight (it was fortunate that trade was slack at Tadger’s that morning), Anthony returned the guinea to his pocket (to Micah’s momentary disgust) and, fumbling open his purse, withdrew therefrom a bank note for five pounds.

“Your master won’t be home till the evening?” said he.

“Not till night, sir,” replied the calm Micah.

“It is that bag that we want.”

“Only the bag, sir?”

“And its contents, of course. Deeds

and law papers that this poor fellow fancies he has a right to, and has run off with, but which are not of the slightest value to him. What do you say?" And Mr. Gurd elevated his eyebrows meaningly, and made a movement with the bank note.

"You shall be in possession of the bag in five minutes, sir," said Micah, holding out his hand.

"Done! It is a bargain, young man," exclaimed Mr. Gurd, pressing the note on Micah's acceptance with trembling haste. "You are a lucky dog to be able to earn five pounds in five minutes! Quick, if you please."

Micah folded up the note and pocketed it, and then, with an unchanged countenance, hastened towards the street door.

"Where are you going?" exclaimed Mr. Gurd in amazement.

"To fetch a constable, sir. Mad or not mad, you know, sir, it is against the law to run off with other people's property. The constable will soon put that right, sir." And to have heard Micah speak, and to have observed him as he spoke, you would

have set him down as the most virtuous and exemplary waiter in London.

Mr. Gurd's countenance fell ruefully and ragefully in an instant.

"Come back! Hang the fellow! he's a bigger fool than even I took him to be," he muttered.

"Yes, sir," said Micah.

"You don't seem quite to understand me, young man. Of course, to obtain the assistance of a constable would be the right course to pursue under ordinary circumstances—a course I myself should have pursued, as I need not inform you, in a common matter of enforcing one's rights. But this case is peculiar, you see. This poor gentleman is unaccountable for his actions, and it is the desire of his relatives, as well as myself, that he is provoked and irritated as little as possible. Besides," continued Mr. Gurd, his prudence giving way before his passionate vexation, "you did not suppose, you *could not* suppose, me such a confounded jackass as to give you five pounds for the trifling favour of fetching a constable? Come,

now speak the truth, young man; you did not imagine any such thing?"

"Upon my word and honour, I did, sir," replied Micah, demurely, as he abandoned his seeming intention of fetching a constable, and came back to Mr. Gurd's table again; "what, then, *did* you give me the five pounds for?"

The bluntness of the question staggered Mr. Anthony somewhat. An answer to match would have been, "As payment for a job of thieving." It might have been safe enough to have replied so to many men; but Micah was such a queer stick, there was no getting at him. Mr. Gurd felt this, and, fussing behind his pocket-handkerchief for a few moments to regain his self-possession, he presently answered,

"What did I give it you for? Why, for a trifling exercise of your ingenuity—supposing that, in common with men of your class, you were possessed of some. I was mistaken it seems, eh? You either have no ingenuity, or you decline to assist me with it? You prefer giving me back my money?"

"Not at all, sir," answered Mr. Micah,

energetically; but whether his denial applied to his non-possession of ingenuity, to his disinclination to exercise it in Mr. Gurd's interest, or to the suggestion as to refunding emanating from the latter, was enigmatical. Mr. Anthony began to suspect that he was being trifled with.

"Let us have no nonsense, my young friend," remarked he.

"None on my part, I assure you, sir," answered Micah, deferentially, and without the ghost of a smile on his face.

"P'raps you do not consider that five pounds is sufficient for the trifling service I ask of you?" said Mr. Gurd, after a considerable pause.

"But what *is* the trifling service, sir?"

"I told you before. I want that bag and its contents. I want you to obtain it for me somehow—anyhow, there! Is *that* intelligible enough to your dull wits?"

"I think I see your meaning clearer now, sir," answered the imperturbable Micah; "you would like me to steal the bag and hand it over to you, and you require to know how much more than five pounds I want for doing the job?"

Mr. Gurd nodded comprehensively, at the same time drumming the pocket where his purse was with two of his fingers.

"Ah! You haven't enough money with you, I'm afraid," remarked Micah, in answer to the significant movement.

"I have another note of the sort you have already," replied Mr. Gurd, with an effort. Not so much that he grudged giving ten pounds for a nest of diamonds of enormous value, as that he was fearful of exciting the waiter's suspicions as to the worth of the fish he was angling for.

"That other one and eight more as well might, perhaps, answer the purpose," said Micah, with no more visible emotion than if he were debating the charge for a dish of eggs and bacon. "I say perhaps; I can't say for certain, of course, as I have not considered it."

Mr. Gurd stared at this, and fidgeted with his lean throat, as though he experienced an uncomfortable sensation there.

"Say done, on the spot!" presently he answered, in a husky voice; "say done, and settle the business within five minutes, and—and—I won't bate you a penny."

"Couldn't be done, sir—couldn't possibly," answered Micah, quietly. "If you were coming this way to-morrow or next day——"

"What the deuce are you talking about?" interrupted Mr. Gurd, furiously. "It is business that won't keep, I tell you—not a day, not an hour. Why can't it be settled at once?"

"Because Mr. Dyot is at home—is in the room overhead at the present moment, sir."

"Is he?" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, in a nervous whisper, and a glance towards the staircase. "Why didn't you say so before? He may have overheard us."

"No fear of that, sir; his door is locked, and he is at prayers, as usual, I'll warrant."

"How d'ye mean at prayers?" asked Mr. Gurd, curiously.

"He passes half his time in that way, I believe, sir," replied Micah. "He carries his prayer-book in the bag you are so anxious about; and whenever he is at home he is bending and bowing over it. Some foreign religion, I should think, sir?"

"Most probably: he has travelled," replied Mr. Gurd, his lips twitching with excitement. "But who has seen him at the—seen him at his prayers? Have you? Has any one in this house?"

"I have seen him—accidentally—as I was passing the keyhole of his door," replied Micah.

Mr. Gurd reflected for a few moments, and then said he,

"Could you ascertain whether the poor gentleman is at his prayers now? A good deal depends on that as to whether we can put off our little business until to-morrow. It will show him to be in a calm mood, you see, and unlikely to break out into new freaks. D'y'e understand?"

Micah nodded as though he did very perfectly, and crept away on tiptoe up the stairs, stealthy as a cat. Presently he returned to say that the poor gentleman *was* at his prayers.

"What! bending and bowing over his book, as you before saw?" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, eagerly.

"With his head down and his arms spread about it, like so," replied Micah,

illustrating the poor gentleman's position on the coffee-room table.

"Might I be allowed just a glimpse of him—just a little glimpse. I should like it very much, my young friend, if I might."

"Come this way, and tread softly," said Micah, "and be quick, lest a customer comes in."

Soft and quick was Anthony as Mr. Micah himself; and, when they silently reached the first landing, Micah pointed to a keyhole, and Mr. Gurd promptly applied his eye thereto; and, after a moment, his bent knees took to trembling so that a pretty devil's tattoo they would have beat against the door had they been six inches closer. He stuck to the peephole so that Micah was obliged to pull him away; and even then he looked so strangely, and worked his lips in such a queer way, that the waiter had to enjoin and threaten him even, in dumb show, ere he could make him understand the importance of going down-stairs as noiselessly as they had come up.

CHAPTER VII.

ADMITS THE READER TO A PRIVATE VIEW
OF MR. DYOT AT HIS DEVOTIONS.

THE strangest of strange religions was that of the poor gentleman at whom, through the keyhole of his private chamber door, the two conspirators had stolen a view. Quite correct was Mr. Micah in his guess that the religion in question might be a foreign religion. All England—all Europe, possibly—might have been in vain explored in search of another instance of its practice. Nobody except Mr. Humphrey Dyot was master of its mysteries; and he kept it profoundly secret as though, instead of a guide to goodness, it were some tremendous sin.

It is no secret how and where Mr. Dyot came by this peculiar pious possession; or, if the reader has forgotten—an act of carelessness the less excusable since at the time

he was advised otherwise—he has but to turn back to the second chapter of this story and there he will find the fact, if not explicitly stated, at least broadly hinted. It was on that island shore in the Indian seas where Humphrey was stranded after his five or six days' heaving and tossing in a doubtful little boat at sea that the rash idea took root in his gloomy and superstitious mind, and there found nourishment and encouragement until such time as he discovered opportunity for setting it out boldly for growth.

All the ceremonies, however, connected with Humphrey Dyot's strange religion were not mystic and heathenish. The service commenced with prayer, invariably—simple, earnest, prayer, in which kneeling down, and with hands clasped, the suppliant implored a continuance of that favour and protection it had pleased God hitherto to exhibit towards him as well as for increasing strength, that he might pursue his purpose without faltering. He spoke of "his purpose" as though it were one to which all others were subservient, and represented the sole aim and end of his being. Then

he proceeded to the second part of the service, which, to an observer unacquainted with the mysteries of the foreign religion, was scarcely as intelligible.

It involved the use of a book. From the indistinct view Mr. Micah had been enabled to obtain of it through the medium of the keyhole, he had pronounced it a prayer-book ; but this it was not. From its size it might have been a Bible, rather, of the old fashioned quarto edition ; but it was not a Bible. It was not a reading-book at all, but a *writing*-book—a book which, seen open, and with its methodical ruling and its heading of “Debtor” on this side, and “Creditor” on that, might have been just an ordinary ledger of the counting-house. When the book was closed, however, its appearance denoted it to be, if an account-book at all, one of an uncommon kind, for its massy covers were hinged to the back with hinges of metal, and its corners were bound with copper. The ruling of its pages was very narrow, so that an expert and industrious pen would find it tough work to fill more than one of the said pages within an hour.

Mr. Dyot, however, did not show himself to be an industrious book-keeper on the morning in question. Earnestly had he prayed the customary prayer, heartier even than ever before had he invoked the heavenly powers to endow him with renewed strength that he might faithfully pursue "his purpose," as well as with a mind just and honest to weigh right and wrong, and a firm determination to set down Truth only, however glaringly it might show to his condemnation. And then, releasing his account-book from the leather bag, he opened it at about fifty pages from the beginning (the fifty pages only being written on, and the whole of the remainder of the book as yet blank), and composed himself before it to write.

At the outset, however, he encountered a hindrance. At the top of the page there were three or four lines of writing, the termination of an entry began on the page preceding. These few lines Humphrey perused slowly and deliberately, and then turned back the leaf and read the item through from the beginning, and so he continued to read and read, his face each

moment growing more despairing and hopeless looking, until presently, with a great sigh, he shut the book abruptly, and folded his arms on it, and bowed his head on his arms.

“Mockery, all Mockery!” whispered he, wofully, at the same time casting aside his pen as though it were guilty as an accessory; “worse and worse. Small sins omitted entirely; great sins smoothed and glozed over because I am, after all, afraid to face them, written down in all their naked hideousness. Never was human conception purer or more worthy, but the pitchy blackness of my nature has defiled it; my sin has coaxed it under its cloak and stifled it. Useless work!—useless work!” continued he, fluttering the written pages with his angry fingers; “every line, every letter here written should be cancelled or overwritten, ‘cheat and coward,’ for so I am, God help me! and so I shall remain, I much fear, till the end!”

So, bowed in tribulation, he appeared when prying Mr. Gurd peeped through the keyhole and obtained a glimpse at him; and had that keen-eared individual caught the

burden of the poor gentleman's lament—had he overheard him declare himself no better than a cheat and a coward, in all probability the pill-doctor would have set the self-accusation down as referring to his delinquency in the matter of Captain Crosbie's precious charge. It would have afforded Mr. Anthony supreme satisfaction to have heard the words, inasmuch as they chimed so exactly with his preconceived opinion as to the facts of the case. "Cheat and coward! To be sure," would have been the pill-doctor's generous commentary, "if he were to sit down and enter into a circumstantial account of this precious business from first to last, he could not tell us more than these two little words tell. It is the cheat who holds the treasure from its rightful owner, and the coward who lacks the courage to convert it to his own use and benefit. A pretty dish of roguery spoilt by a taint of spoony honesty!"

It is certain, however, that whatever is the secret of Mr. Dyot's book-keeping, that he will never get on with it while we look over his shoulder. Make sure that his diary—at present, at least—is not such pleasant

reading as to make him heedless who pries into it.

Besides, we have business down-stairs, or we shall have when Micah has supplied the wants of the two customers discovered impatiently waiting in the public-room when Mr. Tadger's faithful servant and the pill-doctor crept down-stairs again. The circumstance of there being customers to attend to was not an unlucky one for Anthony; it gave him opportunity to recover somewhat from the state of excitement into which that private view of the poor gentleman at his prayers had thrown him. By the time Micah rejoined him he was as cool almost for business as a man need be.

"Well, sir," said Micah, softly; "and what do you think of the business now?"

"I think it is a very fortunate thing—a particularly fortunate thing—that I have arrived so opportunely to the poor gentleman's relief," answered Mr. Gurd, with virtuous emphasis.

"To his relief; yes, sir," responded the waiter, with an expressionless face.

“What time does my poor friend usually go out?”

“If as usual, he will go out almost directly,” said Micah.

“And is he likely to be gone long?”

“Probably he will not return till night.”

“And Mr. Tadger, he too will not return till night, eh?”

“He said that he was sure to be home by nine o’clock.”

“And yet you talk about to-morrow for our little affair!”

“To-morrow or next day, I said, sir,” returned Micah, politely correcting Mr. Anthony, who was growing excited again. “I can’t promise at all at present, sir, not having considered it; and I never do anything without first weighing it to the best of my poor ability.”

“But, you silly fellow,” remarked Mr. Gurd, in so loud a whisper that the customer who was deep in newspaper politics at the further end of the room, coughed disapproval, “why not to-day? Why not this afternoon? I don’t so much care; but consider the trouble you will save your-

self. Nobody at home; nobody likely to come home for hours. Why, bless my life, it's just as easy as this. There! that's how easy it is!"

And, as he spoke, Mr. Gurd took up a teaspoon lying at one end of the table, and, gingerly lifting it to the other end, laid it down.

"Hu-s-sh! Don't talk so loud, please, sir," said Micah. "Yes, sir, what you say is quite true as far as it goes; but it don't go all the way. If I undertake this little job at all, sir, you'll excuse me if I prefer doing it when some one else is in charge of the house. I should go about it with more confidence, I assure you, sir."

"Umph! Well, to be sure, there is something in that," remarked Mr. Gurd, regarding the waiter meaningly; "and," after a pause, "of course, there are other servants here besides yourself?"

"There are two chambermaids and a housemaid," replied Micah.

"Old servants here?"

"All old servants, sir."

"Trustworthy, I suppose; quite beyond suspicion, eh?" sneered Mr. Gurd.

"Quite, sir. There is another servant, if you can call him such; a boy who jobs, and cleans knives, and goes errands."

"Lodges out of the house?"

"Oh, yes, sir. A rough sort of a boy he is; glad to do anything. A very poor boy."

Mr. Gurd opened his eyes till they were in part visible above his spectacle glasses.

"Why, then, there you are!" whispered he, significantly.

"There's something in that, perhaps," returned Micah, after a pause.

"Something in it! I tell you what, young man, if I had known what a ridiculously easy job it was we were bargaining over, you wouldn't have got me to agree to such handsome terms, I assure you. Why, that boy should knock twenty pounds off the price; twenty pounds at least, if a penny." And Mr. Gurd shook his head in a manner that showed that he was in earnest.

"Well, well, we shall see, sir," was Micah's quiet rejoinder.

"Shall I come here to-morrow; or how snall we manage?" inquired Anthony, anxiously.

"Leave me your address," replied Micah, "and when I have considered the matter I will send you word."

"Consider! What the d—l is there to consider? You've got a handy boy, actually waiting to take off your shoulders even the shadow of suspicion; it is money down—in gold if you prefer it—the moment that I am satisfied that the bag contains the—a—documents I am anxious to get possession of, and yet you talk about consideration!"

"I can do nothing without it, sir," replied Micah, respectfully, though firmly.

"You must have your own foolish way, then, I suppose," said Anthony, after a little reflection. "You may as well give me that five-pound note back again, so that if you send word to me to-morrow—at the 'Hand and Vulture,' Norton Folgate, I am staying at present—name of Balderson—saying that you altogether decline my proposition, why there, you know, will be an end to the business."

"If I should arrive at that conclusion, I will inclose the note when I send the message, if it is the same thing to you, sir," returned Micah, blandly. "Balderson,

‘Hand and Vulture.’ Yes, sir; you shall have my answer some time to-morrow evening, without fail.”

There were no better terms to be made, and at that Mr. Gurd was compelled to leave it, hurrying straight away to the ‘Hand and Vulture’ to announce himself as Mr. Balderson, from the country, requiring a bed and sitting-room for a day or two.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST ROBBER, FOR REASONS OF HIS OWN,
SHOWS THE WHITE FEATHER.

HIS bed and board secured at the "Hand and Vulture," in Norton Folgate, Mr. Gurd's first idea was to return immediately to Old Fish Street, and apprise his sister Mercy of the progress of the delicate little business in which he had engaged; on mature reflection, however, he resolved on a different mode of procedure.

It must not be supposed that Mr. Micah in his affectation of simplicity, had succeeded in completely imposing on the cunning pill and caul-merchant. Indeed, ever since the latter had parted from the waiter, his mind had been sorely vexed with doubts and misgivings on the subject. His knowledge of the world and its business inhabitants, however, helped him with no

great difficulty to the conclusion that Micah was nothing better than a very cautious rogue indeed—a fellow careful of his steps, and one least of all likely to put his foot to any depth into peril without first testing its temperature with his finger tip.

So Mr. Gurd wrote a note briefly to the effect that he was all right—quite right—and that his business was going on smoother than even might be expected; and that he was resolved not to return until its happy conclusion, whenever that might be. He would thank his sister to return, per bearer, a change of clothes and linen in a carpet-bag, taking care to pin 3 T. Pea-Hens in the waistcoat pocket. By 3 T. Pea-Hens Mr. Gurd meant three ten-pound notes, the paper currency of the realm being so playfully recognized by the pill-doctor and his sister. Besides, there was nothing like caution; the messenger, though an old servant at the “Hand and Vulture,” might see no great harm in broaching a letter, and thirty pounds is a large sum.

Through that and the fore part of the day following, Mr. Gurd kept pretty much within doors, and, come the wane of the

winter's day, he grew anxious for the performance of Micah's promise. His confederate had not specified the exact hour when his message should be dispatched, or who should be its carrier, or what would be its shape; so that he could make no inquiries respecting it. But the afternoon became evening, and the evening night, and nobody came to ask for Mr. Balderson; and after sitting up so late as eleven o'clock, in a most unenviable frame of mind, Mr. Balderson retired to bed.

All through the day following, still no message, until it grew dark, when Mr. Balderson could restrain his impatience no longer, and he resolved to pay a visit to Wormwood Street to find out what blocked the way. "It is hardly likely that Mr. Tadger will know me again, for he never saw me so respectably dressed before, and I will take the additional precaution of wearing this muffler round my throat, and which the coldness of the night warrants," said Mr. Gurd, to himself, as he set out in a tremendous ill-humour.

Micah, the waiter, might have been on the look-out for him, judging from the

alacrity with which he approached the muffled customer the moment he set foot inside the public-room.

"Glad you're come," Micah addressed him in a low, swift whisper, "you're come here to stay a day or so."

"No, I haven't," returned the savage customer; "you know well enough——"

"Yes, you have," interrupted the mysterious Micah, speaking scarcely above his breath; "trust to me; you won't be sorry." And then speaking aloud, as though in answer to some inquiry by the muffled customer, said he,

"Certainly, sir, you can be accommodated. Have you any luggage you wish fetched, sir!"

"There's a carpet-bag," replied Anthony, still much bewildered; "to-morrow will be time enough for that. But look you, my friend! what d'ye mean by all this? what——"

"Very good, sir; send round to the 'Hand and Vulture' for it in the morning without fail," was all Micah said in reply; but by a movement of his lips and an upward glance towards the ceiling, he signed that it

would be necessary for Mr. Balderson to restrain his impatience until he retired for the night.

Reading the signal so, and as it was by this time growing late, it was not long before Mr. Gurd, spurred by tormenting conjecture, announced his desire to go to bed, making sure that Micah would be his esquire. But, to his intense disgust, that person received Mr. Gurd's intimation with all imaginable coolness, and, ringing a bell, which caused the appearance of a chambermaid, desired that she would conduct the gentleman to No. 8.

He could not content himself to go to bed, however. If Micah did not mean by his signs, "I will explain all this seeming mystery by and by," what did he mean? By and by could not possibly extend beyond the time of Micah's going to bed, and there was nothing left for it but to await that event.

And after long and weary waiting and watching (there was no fire in the room, and the frost was baking on the windows), he heard a sound of bolting and barring below, and presently after the footsteps of

two men ascending the next flight of stairs, and then he heard the unmistakable voice of Micah, the waiter, bidding his master "Good-night!" and immediately after a shutting of doors overhead, and all was still. All was dark, too; for at that moment Mr. Gurd's limited modicum of candle departed this life with an evil odour.

"What does this mean?" Mr. Anthony mentally demanded of himself, as these various evidences that it was time that all good people were in bed were made manifest to him. "Is this young gentleman humbugging me, or is it merely according to his confounded cautious way of doing things? If it wasn't such a respectable house I should begin to suspect something wrong. Suppose all this should be a trap set by this precious waiter to get me here with my money, so that he may cut my throat in the night and rob me!" And as he thought this Mr. Gurd's teeth took to chattering in a way that even the exceeding coldness of the night did not warrant. "I wonder if I am strong enough to drag that washstand before the door?" thought

Anthony; and with that he rose softly from the foot of the bed, where for an hour and a half he had been sitting, for the purpose of testing his strength; and at the same moment the door itself opened, and the cut-throat himself passed swiftly in, closing it noiselessly behind him.

"Began to grow rather tired of waiting for me, I suppose, sir?" remarked Micah, who, except that he was without his coat and shoes, and, as Mr. Gurd could see by the dim light, considerably paler than ordinary, was the same old Micah with the same purring way with him.

"I shall be glad if you will inform me in as few words as possible, what all this nonsense means," rejoined Mr. Gurd, alias Balderson, only partially recovered from his sudden fright, but affecting to speak as though quite equal to the situation.

"Our words must not be more than few, for it would never do for me to be missed out of my bed-room," replied Micah. "I have considered regarding that little job, sir."

"Well, and you have arrived at the conclusion that——"

"That it won't suit me, sir."

The shades of night were merciful in concealing the expression of ferocious disappointment that for a moment passed over Mr. Balderson's never-at-any-time-hand-some face.

"D'ye mean to tell me that you have manœuvred me into this house to tell me that?" he demanded.

"That amongst other matters that may better please you," returned Micah, calmly. "I can't myself get what you want, but I will put you in the way of getting it."

"You are afraid."

"Candidly, I am, sir."

"You think that you would run more risk than fifty pounds would meet?"

"I have given up the consideration of money altogether, sir. There are matters that money in any amount wouldn't mend. I decline, as you say, because I am afraid."

"And haven't you sense enough to see that what you would find difficult I should find ten times more so?" said Mr. Balderson, savagely.

"I have sense enough to suspect that what you are willing to pay for the job

does not represent by a very considerable amount its value to you, sir," replied Micah, quietly. "However, as I said before, I am not unwilling to put you in the way of accomplishing what you desire."

"And you will do this, having given up the money consideration?" exclaimed Mr. Balderson, suspiciously. "It's all humbug, young man; it is not in human nature."

"You don't quite understand me, Mr. Balderson. What I meant was that no addition to the sum you already offer should induce me to run *the* risk. For the sum you offer I will give you my assistance. What do you say, sir?"

"I can say nothing until I hear further what your plans are." Mr. Balderson began to wish himself snug at home and in bed in Old Fish Street.

"My plans are easily enough explained. Mr. Dyot's room is on the same floor as this. He takes a cup of coffee before he goes to bed. You are a medical man, and know all about drugs. Give me something simple—something perfectly simple and tasteless, mind—and I will add it to his

coffee, so that he shall sleep very soundly. I will provide you with a key that will open his door. The bag rests on his pillow."

All this, though spoken in a whisper, was uttered with sufficient emphasis on each sentence. Mr. Balderson made no reply for at least a quarter of a minute, and then, in quite an altered voice, said he, nervously,

"Phew! it sounds like plotting for a murder!"

"It does, rather," returned Micah; "but there must be no mistaking reality for sound. A *simple* drug it must be, you understand, sir. If you should be so unfortunate, in your anxiety to make his sleep sound enough, to prepare a dose that is too strong—you understand what I mean, sir—of course, I should be bound, in self-defence, to up and say all I know about it."

"It would be easy enough as far as supplying you with a simple drug goes," said Mr. Balderson, still in a sweat of horror, despite the efforts of the devil of avarice at that moment busy with him

endeavouring to sponge him cool and comfortable, and bring him to the scratch in prime condition. "But—but—the bag secured, what am I to do with it."

"This window looks down into the street, and ten yards of string would reach the pavement."

"Well?"

"I can suggest nothing beyond that, sir," said Micah, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, young man," Mr. Gurd presently remarked, in tones of resignation, "your plan has its ugly features, and nothing but my interest in the cause of humanity should tempt me to adopt it; but since there is no other way, why——" And in the dark he shrugged his shoulders in place of saying "so it must be."

"Then no more need be said about it, sir; and I wish you a very good night," remarked Mr. Micah, preparing to quit the room. "Any time in the course of to-morrow will do for the composing draught, sir. Excepting that, I think you need trouble yourself about nothing, but hold yourself in readiness at just this time to-morrow night."

"I'll be ready," replied Mr. Balderson.

"With the money, sir? I hand you the key, and you hand me the money—in gold, if it makes no difference to you, sir."

"I'll be ready." And so the worthy pair parted.

And ready he was. A second note safely conveyed next morning to Miss Gurd in Old Fish Street, advised that lady to make it convenient to be passing through Wormwood Street, on Tadger's side of the way, with a sharp look out for the descent of a certain something from a second floor window, precisely as Bishopsgate church chimed a quarter-past twelve that night.

All next day he bestowed himself at the "Hand and Vulture," and towards night he left that hotel bringing with him his luggage. Micah received it, and at the same time a tiny bottle, which latter he dexterously slipped into his jacket pocket.

Mr. Balderson dined, and in the course of the evening partook of three strong and hot glasses of brandy-and-water.

Mr. Dyot, who came in about eight

o'clock, passed, and a mere exchange of "Good evening!" with Mr. Tadger, up to his private room. At nine he rang his bell for coffee, and Micah carried him a nice, comforting, spicy-smelling cup.

Mr. Balderson was in no hurry for bed; he sat up reading a magazine until the clock struck eleven; and then, looking but shaky for a desperado, he took his candle and retired. There were several candlesticks with candles in them standing ready for the various lodgers, and it was curious to observe the shrewd eye Mr. Balderson had for the most liberal allowance. To be sure, it was as yet only eleven o'clock, and an hour and a quarter is a long time.

He didn't go to bed; but, hanging his pocket handkerchief over the keyhole so that nobody might serve him the same scurvy trick that seemingly was frequently practised against unfortunate No. 4, he set about amusing himself. He took from his pocket a hank of stout twine and a hook, and for the space of fully a quarter of an hour found employment in splicing the cord securely to the shank of it. This job done, he took out a canvas bag, and counted its

contents over, and over, and over again, each time slower than the last, and with frequent sighs and dubious shakings of his head. Then he toyed with the angling apparatus again, and, tired of that, leant his arms on the washstand and read out of an old newspaper, neatly pinned to the wall to save soap splashes, an account of the last moments of William Quagshire, hanged at Derby for the crime of arson. He had accompanied the unfortunate William as far as the drop, and the executioner was just about to draw the bolt, when, stealthy as a ghost, and as white almost, in stalked Micah, the waiter.

"You are quite ready?" he asked, taking the candle and placing it on the hob of the fireplace.

"Quite ready," Mr. Balderson whispered back.

"The money," said Micah, holding out his hand.

"The key," said Mr. Balderson, following suit.

Key and money-bag changed hands, and then Micah blew the candle out.

"You won't want a light," said he; "the moon shows with light enough for your purpose. Good-night."

"You may as well wait till—till I have got it," said Mr. Balderson, persuasively; "it won't take a minute."

"I'll wait on the stairs," replied Micah, in a nervous whisper; "make haste."

Screwing up his courage, Mr. Balderson crept out of the room at the same time that Micah did, and while the latter strode with his stockinged feet up a few stairs, Mr. Balderson approached the door of No. 4. In another moment or so the key was in the well-oiled lock, and then the door opened.

There was a little moonlight in the room, very little, but enough to reveal to the thief a sight that stayed his trembling; there lay the valise at the bed-head, and the sleeper's hand had dropped away from it. The most experienced burglar that ever lived could not have proceeded with more stealth. Three, four, five steps; now his hand is on the bag, and he lifts it and moves away, holding it tight, never fear.

“Thieves! help! thieves!”

Coming so suddenly and in such shrill, terrified tones, it was enough to frighten any man. It frightened poor Mr. Balderson. Had he held in his hand his life instead of the leather bag, he would have been compelled to drop it. Darting to his own room, he barely caught a glimpse of the ghastly face of Mr. Micah, as that gentleman took the stairs three at a time in his hurry to reach his apartment on the next floor.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH DIAMOND, AS A CUTTER, PROVES ITSELF MORE EFFICIENT THAN BRISTOL PASTE.

SINGULAR was the momentary dead silence that ensued on Mr. Dyot's loud and thrilling call for help against thieves.

It is easily explained, however. In the first place, the person on whom the outrage was attempted made no effort to pursue and capture the would-be robber. All he did was to eagerly repossess himself of the precious bag, and then, shaking with terror, probably lest the robber might return, he hurried to the door, and shut and securely locked it. By reason of there being a second key in the door, on the outside, this was not easy of accomplishment until the obstacle was removed.

In the second place, it was of all things unlikely that the individual trading under

the alias of Balderson would make himself conspicuous after he had gained the security of his chamber. In mortal terror lest the gaunt, white-shirted figure that had risen all so unexpectedly from its bed to baulk his infamous design might be coming after him, he had with great precipitancy bolted into bed with his trousers on, quaking and trembling till the little brass rings from which the bed furniture was suspended chinked and jingled. It was only for a few minutes, however, that he laboured under this helpless fright. He could not avoid the terrible reflection that the house would presently be in an uproar, and a strict inquiry for the delinquent set on foot; and then he skipped out of bed again more nimbly even than he had skipped into it. The existence of the cord and hook flashed to his mind, and in his desperate state he had thoughts of making the apparatus fast to the window-sill and lowering himself into the street. An instant investigation of the line and hook, however, convinced him of the folly of the idea, in substitution of which another much more to the purpose entered his head—

“It will never do for this thing to be found here; it would convict me at once.” And, rapidly winding the cord about the hook, he put his arm out at the slightly-raised casement, and threw the little parcel far up the street.

By this time there was the expected row in the house. Mr. Dyot, as it seemed, had on deliberate consideration resolved that the best course for him would be to ring his bell, and the other lodgers, who had nothing to consider except that it was mightily alarming to be awoke in the middle of the night by a shout of “Thieves!” took to ringing *their* bells in a very vigorous manner. Not to be an exception, Mr. Gurd, who by this time had donned his nightcap and otherwise arranged himself, like a honest bed-fellow, betook himself to adding to the general discord by ringing *his* bell; and though these particulars have occupied at the least two minutes in setting down, it may be fairly assumed that, from the moment when the alarming cry was first uttered to the time when the bell-ringing commenced, not more than twenty seconds elapsed.

Certainly not time enough to enable the bewildered and cowardly Micah to divest himself of his garments, and make other little necessary arrangements for the safe disposal of his share of the booty, before the worthy coffee-house proprietor, in a state of tremendous excitement, rushed into his servant's sleeping-apartment.

"Hi! Micah! d'ye hear? Wake up, man; there's thieves in the house!"

It was while Mr. Tadger was scuttling across the landing that divided his bed-chamber from the one that Micah occupied that he gave utterance to these ejaculations; but when he fairly reached the room, and, unhesitatingly opening the door, put his head in, a sight presented itself that caused Mr. Tadger at once to alter his tune. Micah was not a-bed. His candle was still burning, enabling his master to perceive that, with an aghast and troubled face, the waiter was endeavouring to get a leg *out* of his trousers, instead of into them, while his clothes-box was dragged from its accustomed place, and the lid of it was open.

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"Hallo ! what is the meaning of this ?" he exclaimed.

Micah, becoming still more ghastly in his endeavours to appear composed, moved his lips, but no sound proceeded therefrom, as there he sat, clutching at the disengaged trouser-leg as though therein lay his only hope.

"D'ye hear, you idiot ?" cried Mr. Tadger. "Are you turned silly, or dumb, that you can't answer me ? Since you were not a-bed, why did you not come when I first called out ?"

"I—I was just dressing when you came in, sir," Micah contrived to reply. "I was a-bed, you see, sir ; and—and, being a heavy sleeper, sir——"

"Being a confounded liar, you mean," interrupted Mr. Tadger, indignantly, as he pointed with his hook to the smooth, unused bed. "What have you been up to there ?"

By "there" Mr. Tadger meant the spot where Micah's clothes-chest stood open, as before stated ; and, without ceremony, he took the candle and advanced towards it. To this, however, Micah objected, and

springing forward, reached the box just before Mr. Tadger did, and shut it down with a bang, and set his foot on it.

"No, sir," he exclaimed, with a feeble assumption of honest indignation; "much as I respect you, Mr. Tadger, I cannot allow that, sir. If you will not spare my feelings, have, at least, some consideration for——"

Mr. Tadger was not commonly addicted to the use of bad language, but now he was provoked beyond endurance.

"D—n your feelings, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "What are your feelings compared with the good name of my house?" And dexterously hooking the guilty wretch by the neckerchief, by a jerk of his sinewy arm stump, Micah was sent staggering to the opposite wall; while Mr. Tadger, raising the box-lid, immediately discovered and pounced on the money-bag, late the property of Gurd, alias Balderson.

"Who's is this?" asked Mr. Tadger, as he held it up. "How came this here?"

"I placed it there. It is no business

of yours, I suppose," Micah replied, in desperation.

"I have no doubt that you placed it there; but who does it belong to? Not to you, or I'm much mistaken."

"It's mine," replied Micah, "my savings. Give it back to me, or I'll——" And he made a threatening gesture, to which the tough old seaman promptly responded by directing his fist of flesh with considerable violence against Mr. Micah's head, flooring him effectually.

"Now you come down-stairs with me," exclaimed Mr. Tadger, as the culprit contrived to scramble on to his legs, and the inexorable hook once more grappled him by the neckcloth; "if you are not answerable for this precious bell-ringing and bother, it is strange to me."

By the time Micah was hauled down the first flight of stairs, half a dozen gentlemen, more or less scantily attired, and with their chamber candlesticks in their hands, were holding scared converse on the next landing. Amongst them was poor Mr. Balderson, so terribly alarmed at the report of thieves as to be scarcely able to

is the key of his own bed-room, gentlemen !”

“ Abominable !” cried the lodgers, in chorus. “ One’s own servant, too ! It’s a mercy all our throats were not cut as we lay asleep.”

“ Such scoundrels should be hanged without benefit of clergy,” remarked charitable Mr. Balderson, turning a gaze as hard and cold as that of a fish towards his miserable confederate, who could only gasp, “ What ! You say that ? *You !*” To which the indignant old gentleman deigned no reply.

“ One moment more, gentlemen,” exclaimed Mr. Tadger. “ Have either of you lost any money from his room ?”

At this there was a general and hasty scramble back to bed-rooms to make investigation. Yes ; one gentleman *had* been robbed. His name was Balderson, and the number of his room was eight.

“ Send for the constables ; send for them instantly !” exclaimed the robbed man, excitedly. “ I have lost five-and-forty sovereigns.”

"How were they secured, sir?" inquired Mr. Tadger, grimly.

"In a blue canvas bag, tied with a bit of black tape," promptly replied Mr. Balderson.

"Then I am glad to be able to restore your property to you, sir," exclaimed Mr. Tadger, taking the bag from his waistcoat pocket. "I found it in the scoundrel's clothes-box."

Mr. Balderson received it eagerly.

"Thank you—thank you!" said he. "Good Lord, gentlemen! What a ruffian he appears to be!"

But by this time Mr. Balderson's coolness had arrived at a pitch that was infectious.

"Just allow me to speak, will you?" remarked Micah, through his set teeth, as he regarded Mr. Balderson with a malignancy that was in some degree excusable. "I did not steal this man's money. I can prove that I did not."

"Then how did you come by it?" inquired Mr. Balderson, in amazed innocence.

"How! you turn-coat! How, you white-livered traitor; why, you *know* how.

You gave it me, not half an hour since. You gave it me for that key, that you might——”

“We’ll have an end to this, my fine fellow,” interrupted Mr. Tadger, more than ever provoked by the robber’s daring impudence; “just open that closet door, will somebody be kind enough?”

Somebody was kind enough, and Mr. Tadger thrust the robber in and turned the key on him.

“Now, if you’ll just allow me to slip my coat and boots on, we’ll have a constable, and clap this fellow where he ought to be in a very little while,” said Mr. Tadger; “make your minds easy, gentlemen, the danger is all over.”

And having put on his coat and boots, Mr. Tadger sallied out, and in a few minutes returned with the constable, whom he had found comfortably asleep in his watchbox by Bishopsgate church.

“Is he likely to resist?” whispered the old gentleman of the lantern and staff, as, in company of Mr. Tadger, with his lodgers bringing up the rear, he approached the closet.

“We’ll precious soon settle him if he does,” replied stout Mr. Tadger, as he boldly unlocked and opened the closet door. But there could not possibly have been less resistance to the entry of the law. Micah, the waiter, had vanished. There was a window in the closet overlooking the flats of certain houses in the rear of Tadger’s, and when the constable flashed his lantern light below, where a man’s feet had heavily alighted was distinctly visible in the dust accumulated on the leads.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH BEING ENTIRELY RETROSPECTIVE IS
NONE THE WORSE FOR BEING SHORT.

“It would serve him right if somebody stole a march on the old rogue,” mused Micah, after the departure of the discontented Mr. Balderson on the morning when the nefarious compact was made between the two worthies (it was merely of somebody—anybody—that he was thinking, therefore he could pursue the idea with freedom). “They are a pair of rascals. I have no doubt that all this manœuvring is nothing but dog bite dog; if somebody was to just step quietly between them, and carry off the bone of contention, and leave them to fight out their grievance! That *would* be a precious fine joke! A precious profitable joke, too, for somebody, I’ll warrant! And a safe

joke, since neither one nor the other—as I take it—would dare openly make a fuss about it.”

And in behalf of “somebody,” Mr. Micah was at the pains to deliberate on how amazingly easy it would be to do the trick.

Then it came to, “If lots of fellows were in my place, eh?”

Then to, “Why should I stick at what lots of fellows—almost any fellow—would do with my prime chance?”

When it came to this frank identification of himself with the “prime chance,” the conflict—if there had really been one from the commencement—was virtually at an end.

Mr. Mystery went out about two o’clock, and twenty minutes afterwards Micah, having cleverly disposed of the two maids at remote parts of the establishment, bade the handy boy mind the shop while he went upstairs to “clean himself.” Two minutes from that time he was in the chamber numbered four with the debated bag in his hands.

"Suppose we just have a peep into it," said Mr. Micah to himself. The bag was locked, but the rascal was ingenious enough to know how to act on the fastening with a bit of bent wire, and in a little while the contents of the receptacle were revealed to him. Mr. Micah's countenance instantly fell, and he expressed his disappointment in a dismal whistle.

"He wouldn't give fifty pounds nor fifty pence for this rubbish," said he; "I wouldn't. He's got the plunder with him, I shouldn't wonder, unless it is in one of his boxes."

The largest box of the two was open, and on the lock of the smaller box the bent wire was successfully brought into operation. But neither contained anything that satisfied the searcher's curiosity.

"He carries it with him; at least he has taken it with him to-day. Perhaps if I left it till to-morrow I should have better luck?" was Micah's reflection. "I will leave it until to-morrow." And with this

he rapidly rearranged everything in Mr. Dyot's apartments precisely as he had found it.

But, to his intense disgust, to-morrow brought him no better fortune than to-day, and Micah was driven to the conclusion either that the booty was otherwise disposed of, or that Mr. Mystery thought it more prudent to carry it constantly about with him.

This was embarrassing. Under such circumstances it would be equally unprofitable to steal the bag on his own account or on behalf of Mr. Balderson; the latter because that cautious old bargain-driver had unmistakably intimated that he would pay for the job when he had satisfied himself that the goods delivered were such as he was in quest of. Then it first came into Micah's head that it would be a splendid stroke of business if he were able to shirk the office of chief actor in the business, and at the same time pocket Mr. Balderson's money. How he contrived towards this end the reader has been already made aware, as well as how the tenderly-hung

scheme tumbled to the ground, landing him in a pit of his confederate's digging partly, and which of course made the failure the more exasperating.

Baffled on every side, and fleeced of his dishonest gains, unenviable, indeed, was the condition of Mr. Micah's mind as he was thrust into the closet. Mr. Balderson's nervous system would have received a severe shock could he have seen the waiter chafing like a wolf in a trap, shaking his fists, and swearing by all that was horrible to have the hypocrite's blood should the chance ever fall in his way.

"But it is I that am the cursed fool!" exclaimed he, beating his clenched fist against his forehead; "I should have taken the bag. The swag *was* in it—in some secret pocket or false bottom. Why else was the fellow in such a tremendous fright about it? I wonder how it would work if I were to call out for this Mr. Dyot before the constables come, and tell him all I know about this confounded business."

But at this moment glancing at the window the possibility of escape occurred to the prisoner, and immediately all his attention was turned in that direction.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH A GLEAM OF MORNING SUNSHINE,
FOLLOWING A NIGHT OF DOUBT AND DARK-
NESS, DAWNS ON MISS MERCY GURD.

MISS MERCY GURD was ill at ease. Upon the table in the little room the reader has already been favoured by a peep into, her breakfast stood untasted; her eyes were weary and red with recent weeping, and her complexion was of that sallow hue that can only be contracted by deprivation of accustomed bed repose, and a lengthened vigil by the light of a tallow candle.

Ordinarily, Mercy appeared at the matutinal meal in her morning robe and frilled night-cap: now she was fully attired, and wore even her bonnet, as she stood by the window, with the curtain raised just a little, looking out yearningly on the cold grey morning.

She was perplexed and dismally apprehensive because of Anthony. That he at times bungled in business she knew, but not nearly to the extent she was in the habit of insinuating in her frequent tiffs with him. Had he bungled on this occasion? After his hopeful—nay, almost playful—epistle concerning the affair in hand, that read as though he had already conquered every difficulty that stood in the way of its consummation, and might now take his easy leisure over the requisite finishing touches, had he, after all, made a mess of it?

What *was* Mercy to think? She had followed out his instructions to the strictest letter. When he wrote her from the “Hand and Vulture” she did precisely as he requested, refraining even from asking the messenger a single question. When the second and more mysterious note came to her, cheered by the expectation that her brother had driven his game into a corner, so that the time of its capture might be fixed to a quarter of an hour (“at a quarter past twelve by the chimes of Bishops-gate church!” said the note), she had

unhesitatingly prepared herself to comply with the terms of it. At twelve o'clock, well wrapped in shawls, and with a thick veil on, she left home, bidding her ancient maiden of all work keep a good fire, for that she expected she should be gone no longer than an hour, and very probably bring back with her her brother, who was coming up from the country by the night coach.

Wormwood Street was not more than ten minutes' sharp walk from Old Fish Street, so that she was at the place appointed in good time, with as sharp a look-out on the second-floor windows in the vicinity of Tadger's as the gloominess of the night permitted. As the chimes struck the quarter her watching was rewarded. Her quick ears caught the sound of a casement opened cautiously; her quick eyes marked the protrusion of a hand, and the flight therefrom of something no larger than a fourpenny tennis-ball. Hurrying from the doorway where she had sought temporary concealment, she made for the spot where the object had alighted, to discover that it was nothing more than an

iron hook bound about with a length of string.

Under such circumstances, it is scarcely to be wondered at that Miss Gurd was taken considerably aback. She could not understand the condition of affairs the least in the world. As she slowly walked away, she unwound the string with extremest carefulness in hopes that perhaps the mystery might be hidden at its core; but its core was no more than a hook of a sort that might at any ironmonger's in London be got for a penny. Was this the "certain something" for which she was with so much urgency directed to look out? Although she had perused it already twenty times at least, she once more took Anthony's note from her pocket, and, by the dim light of an oil-lamp, spelt it over again; but nothing was gained thereby, as the reader may guess.

What did it mean? A hook and a line were of themselves significant articles. Did he intend that *she* should use them in any way? Had he, in the hurry of writing, forgotten to set down some few words that would make what was

inexplicable clear as water? Was Tony at that moment impatiently expecting her to do something on which success entirely depended, while here she was walking to and fro out in Bishopsgate Street bewildered as any simpleton? Suppose she returned to Wormwood Street?

Return she did; and, keeping on the side of the way opposite to Tadger's, with an eager eye for *the* window, walked rapidly past and past again. But the window remained meaningless, and the white blind drooped behind it, still as though it shut the light out of a dead man's room.

At the third time of her passing, however, and when she had got away twenty yards or so, she distinctly heard a withdrawing of door-bolts; not a cautious withdrawing, but loud and hasty; and for that reason she did not look back. The footsteps of a man hurried after her, however; and, while her heart was thumping against her bodice in apprehension, the man overtook her, and touched her on the shoulder.

"D'ye happen to have seen a con-

stable lately, my woman?" asked he, hurriedly.

It was evident from his tone that he mistook her as being no different from the female kind commonly met abroad after midnight.

"What do you want a constable for?" inquired Mercy, in a quaking voice, and holding the thick veil down over her face.

"For a thief. But no matter for that; have you seen a constable hereabout lately, I ask?"

It was Mr. Tadger. Her brother had spoken of him, and described him; and now, as he spoke, he put up his iron hook to adjust the top button of his over-coat. It was Mr. Tadger, and he wanted a constable, because of a thief!

"No, I haven't seen one," replied Mercy.

"Then why couldn't you say so at once?" exclaimed Tadger, gruffly, and away he ran up the street.

Never since the night when her father died, bequeathing the business to herself and brother, had Mercy's system experienced so severe a shock as that occasioned

by Mr. Tadger's words. To do her justice, her tribulation was altogether on Anthony's account, and bore no sort of reference to the apparent miscarriage of the rash scheme, the successful working of which promised to enrich her as well as him. Heart of aloes as was hers towards everybody else, it still preserved a warm and cosy niche for brother Anthony. That the term "thief," as used by Mr. Tadger, applied to her brother, she could entertain no doubt. What was his peril? What the extent of it? She was ignorant of his leaguings with Micah, the waiter; she knew nothing but the very, very little that her brother's two brief notes conveyed, and never suspected, but that he was acting single-handed.

Her first inclination was to hurry after Mr. Tadger, and implore of him fuller particulars of the business that had caused him to quit his house at so strange a time, and on such an errand. But before she had taken ten quick steps in this direction, it occurred to her that, by adopting such a course, she might be making bad worse, as revealing to the coffee-house keeper that

"the thief" had a confederate outside, and that she was that one. So she hurried back again, and finally took up her position in the deep doorway where before she had hidden, and from whence a fair view might be obtained of the coffee-house.

In less than five minutes she saw Mr. Tadger return with the constable, saw them enter the house together, waited in agony for fully twenty minutes, wondering and wondering what could occasion the strange delay, and presently was overwhelmed in amazement to see the door of the coffee-house opened softly, and the constable emerge *alone*. In the stillness of the night she could, by pushing back her bonnet, and making an ear-trumpet with her hands, make out what the constable and Mr. Tadger were whispering about as they stood together on the doorstep.

"Just so; not a word to any one. Let it pass as though nothing at all had happened; that's a good fellow."

It was Mr. Tadger who said this, and as he spoke—as Mercy was witness, as she stood spying the pair with her sharp eyes—he put his hand first in his pocket, and

then laid it on the constable's willing palm.

"No occasion for that, I'm sure, sir. I'm paid very well by the gentlemen themselves. Well, of course, I can't refuse it if you are good enough to insist. Good-night, sir! No fear of me saying a word, though it nat'rally goes against me to let the willin off so easy. Good-night, sir!"

All this in quite a soft whisper, and then the door was gently closed, and the bribed watchman went his way, chanting that it was one o'clock and a starlight morning, as serenely as though throughout Bishopsgate there were no more honest man than he.

Now what what was Mercy Gurd to think? A constable wanted for a thief; urgently, vindictively wanted one minute, and the next the thief pardoned, and the constable as urgently dismissed with stealthy gifts, that he might be induced to hold his tongue, and make believe that there was no thief at all, and that he had never been called out of his watch-box to look after one. "I never knew such a mad business

in all my days," mused Mercy, as she contemplated the still, blank house; "it's like a dream, like a riddle, like anything but reality."

And that the reader may not be made a participator in Miss Mercy Gurd's bewilderment, he shall be informed, quickly as may be, how it came about that the watchman was discharged with bribes and injunctions to secrecy.

"Well, he's clever, no doubt, and bold," was Mr. Constable's observation, as he contemplated the perilous extent of Mr. Micah's leap in the dark; "but I have no doubt that we have cards in our pack that will spoil him of the trick. Perhaps you wouldn't mind stepping up to the office with me, sir [this to Mr. Tadger]; and you; and you, too, sir [this to Messrs. Balderson and Dyot], to enter the charge of attempt, and give his description."

"I'm quite willing," exclaimed Mr. Tadger, in self-sacrificial tones; "it's a precious hard thing for me, who have never had the shadow of suspicion cast on my house or my servants before, ever since I have been in business; but come along,

gentlemen; I suppose there is no help for it."

There was a murmur of sympathy on the part of the lodgers assembled.

"I don't know what these gentlemen may think about it, of course," spoke one of them; "but I say, since nobody's the poorer, why, let the ruffian go; he'll come to the gallows soon enough, without our assistance, I'll warrant."

Mr. Constable shook his head, but, at the same time, with a meaning glance towards the two gentlemen chiefly concerned—

"The law, gentlemen, don't like being played with. A ticklish thing is the law, as I have no doubt you've heard tell before," remarked Mr. Constable, shaking his head as he had seen the magistrate do while delivering himself of a similar pro-fundity.

"Will you kindly step this way for a moment?" observed Mr. Dyot to Mr. Balderson.

"Certainly, sir," replied obliging Mr. Balderson; and next moment he was in the chamber he had quitted so shortly be-

fore and under such pressing and peculiar circumstances. There lay the black leather bag on the dressing-table, and Mr. Dyot offered his guest a chair so close to it that Mr. Balderson could have touched it by putting out his hand.

"May I ask you, sir, what are your feelings concerning this unfortunate matter?" inquired Mr. Dyot. "Do you feel particularly desirous of carrying it further?"

Very decidedly *not*. Only too delighted would Mr. Gurd, alias Balderson, have been to have dropped the matter, never to recur to it again. However, there was time enough to make that declaration.

"How do you mean, sir? How further?" he blandly inquired.

"Are you anxious that this unlucky thief should be apprehended and taken before a magistrate?" replied Mr. Dyot.

"Are *you*?" politely inquired innocent Mr. Balderson.

"On the contrary, I would very gladly avoid anything of the kind," replied Humphrey Dyot, emphatically.

"Umph! conscientious scruples?" suggested Mr. Balderson, amiably.

“Partly.”

“Not entirely?”

“Not entirely. As between gentlemen, I may tell you that it would be very inconvenient to me to have the—a—object of this poor rogue’s cupidity canvassed and discussed in a public court. I am, of course, aware, my good sir, that I have no claim on either your forbearance or your sympathy. I merely suggest that if you have no special——”

“My dear friend!” interrupted Anthony, his blood set all a-tingling again at Mr. Dyot’s mysterious allusion to “the object of the poor rogue’s cupidity,” “I cannot allow you to say another word before I assure you of my perfect agreement with your honourable sentiments. Far be it from me to persecute the poor wretch. Mine was a mere money loss—or, rather, it threatened to be so—a paltry five-and-forty pounds, and no doubt not to be compared with what might have been *your* loss, my dear sir. I have my money restored to me, and you have got your property safe [this with a glance at the bag], and, since you are agreeable, we will, if the

constable allows, let the matter proceed no further."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, sir," exclaimed Mr. Dyot, earnestly; "and shall ever hold myself your debtor for your generous resolution."

"I shall be delighted to know you better, sir," responded the generous gentleman, squeezing Mr. Dyot's extended hand.

And so it came about that, five minutes after the conversation above detailed, Mr. Constable was discovered bowing and scraping himself out of the house, no less to the delight of Messrs. Balderson and Dyot than to that of Mr. Tadger, who was a plain-sailing man, and hated the law with all his heart.

And so it further came about that poor Miss Mercy's watching and weeping were in a degree endured for an unworthy object. Not that the object (Anthony that is) was perfectly at his ease. Although within half an hour of the escape of his confederate he was snug in bed, he was not in a condition of mind conducive to sweet repose. On the contrary, luck had blown on him during the last two hours in such alternate blasts

of hot and cold as to leave him mentally aguish, so that sleep was out of the question, and he lay through the greater part of the night more or less rationally thinking, and scheming, and plotting.

So that it still further came about that the two friends of overnight, Mr. Gurd (for reasons of his own, and now that Micah was gone and unable to contradict him, dropped his assumed name of Balderson) and Mr. Dyot, sat at breakfast together in the apartment of the former, Mr. Gurd in the course of the pleasant meal judiciously uttering an unlimited number of purposeful lies coined by him as he lay awake through the previous night, and all of which unsuspecting Mr. Humphrey Dyot received as gospel truth.

So that, and again further still, it came about that, while Miss Mercy Gurd at about the hour of eleven in the morning in question, still looking dismally abroad from her window in search of Anthony, to her great astonishment, she presently spied the lost one, with an elastic step and a cheerful countenance, linked on to the arm of a tall, melancholy gentleman, who carried in his

hand with great care a leather travelling-bag.

It was some little time, the morning being hazy, ere Mercy could assure herself of the accuracy of her eyesight. Even in those days there were persons, professed thief-catchers, who went about in plain clothing; and his sister's first impression was that Anthony was in custody, and about to be conveyed to Bow Street; but when, from her peep-hole, she saw the two gentlemen approach the house-steps and heard the lightsome rat-tat-tat that Mr. Gurd knocked at the door, her terror vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

MICAH SEEKS COUNSEL AND ENCOURAGEMENT
OF HIS BROTHER EDWARD. BY CONTRIVANCE
OF THE LATTER, WILLIAM HOGAN IS WAY-
LAID AND BEGUILED TO REPEAT HIS CELE-
BRATED "GHOST STORY."

ALL Micah Blake's worldly possessions, when he found a path to liberty over the tiles, consisted in the clothes he crawled on all fours in, and the sum of eight shillings and elevenpence in copper money; and on this (after he had expended one and ninepence in a necessary jacket—wofully dirty and greasy—and a cap to match) he had been compelled to subsist through fourteen long days.

It would have been otherwise, in all probability, but that, in whatever direction he turned, his luck was out. On the night of his flight over the housetops, after alight-

ing on the stone pavement by means of a convenient waterspout, he made all haste towards Fenchurch Street, and thence to Cable Street, Ratcliff, for there, in Capstan Alley, lived his only relative, his brother Edward, who, although younger than Micah, and of no particular trade or profession, had a heart that could feel for another, and generally a crown or so in his pockets. But Edward wasn't at home. When Micah, steaming with perspiration—albeit the night was gusty and his shirt all that protected his shoulders—knocked at the door, Edward's landlord put his head out at the window, and, after ascertaining who the visitor was, cautiously informed him that Mr. Blake had been from home three weeks and more, and that it was by no means certain when he would return.

"In cage is he?" inquired Micah, dismally.

"No; he's all right as far as that goes," replied the landlord; "but, d'ye see, inquiries after him from a certain quarter have been a little too pressing to be pleasant. Good-night!"

Micah would have asked for a night's

lodging, only that the sudden and uncere-
monious shutting down of the window
prevented ; and, since he knew no one else
in the neighbourhood, and was too full of
terror of constables to trust himself in a
common lodging-house, it need scarcely be
stated that he passed a very unpleasant
five hours before the dawn of morning.

Ever since, he had done nothing but
hang about the neighbouring low public-
houses, day and evening, looking out for
brother Edward. It was in a public-house
that we find him after his fortnight's
absence, in a filthy little Ratcliff tap-room,
with his last penny invested in the half-pint
of beer that stands on the table before him,
but with a more hopeful face than he has
worn for many a day, for he has received
news of his brother's coming ; and anyone
pushing open the constantly swinging outer
door, of which the tap-room commands a
view, may be the man so eagerly expected.

Only for Micah's recognition of him
when at last he does come, it would never
have been suspected that Teddy Blake was
Micah's brother, or, indeed, that he was
the kind of young man concerning whom

parties "in certain quarters" need trouble their heads. A genteely-built, intelligent-looking fellow, quick-eyed and brisk in his manner, neatly dressed, and with as easy an air as though he were a wharf clerk just stepped in to take his eleven o'clock glass of beer. There were other customers at the bar when Mr. Blake entered, which possibly accounted for the merely passing glance with which that gentleman favoured both the tap-room and the solitary shabby one sitting there. The solitary shabby one, uttering an involuntary exclamation of pleasure, and half rising from his seat at sight of his brother, sank back again considerably disappointed and disgusted at what he imagined to be a decided manifestation of fraternal coolness.

He was mistaken, however. Persons of the profession Mr. Blake had long since adopted have need of extreme caution and prudence. The plodding, honest labourer, hearing of dandy prigs and "swell-mobsmen," reading of such in the criminal records of the newspapers, with an account of the fine clothes they wear, and the jewellery, and the amount of gold and silver

coin found in their possession at the time of their apprehension, may be inclined to the reflection that it is easier to be a thief than a toiler in the hilly and rugged way of integrity. To become a thief requires no capital. Any man bold enough, and light enough of hand, and with nimble feet, may step out of the path of drudgery any day; and, if he have ordinary luck, in less than a week he may put fine clothes on his back and money in his pocket—plenty of money—enough for all his necessities; for his pleasure; for all manner of luxury and extravagance—enough, in short, for everything but the one main thing, without which, all other conditions seemingly never so favourable, a man *must* be miserable—a sense of liberty. At best he is no better than a bailed man, his own luck and shrewdness on the one side, and the unreadiness of the law on the other standing his friends. When one or the other fails him he is pounced on and hauled to prison; and the worst of it is, that he is never sure of these friends of his. At any moment they may desert him. He never can say, “I will walk to the end of this or that road;” he

never can be sure of a night's rest in his bed; he cultivates friendships and affections as do honest men—he cannot live without them; and they, instead of bringing him comfort, are all and everyone sources of worry and anxiety constantly, the more he yearns to them, because of the cruel severance he knows presently must be. All these cares has the thief, besides those that naturally attach to a successful prosecution of his business. Make no doubt, honest jog-trot labourer, that the man by trade a thief is the hardest-worked and most ill-paid journeyman in the world. If they dared, I verily believe that the whole body would strike for honest employment to-morrow morning.

Mr. Edward Blake, being a thief, and possibly actuated by sundry of the above quoted conditions, coolly passed his brother, and, calling for a little cold brandy, held up a newspaper before him on pretence of reading the latest news, but in reality that he might, unperceived, recover from his astonishment. The process was not a protracted one. In less than two minutes he was writing something seemingly from the

advertisement columns of the newspaper, on a leaf torn from his pocket-book, and after folding two sovereigns in the paper, he scrawled a few words on the outside, and gave it to the barmaid with the careless remark, "Take care of this will you, miss," and then went on sipping his cold brandy and reading the news.

On the paper was written, "For the man with red whiskers in the tap-room;" and the barmaid, knowing her customer, saw that the order was attended to at once.

"Have a wash and shave, and change your clothes for something decent. Meet me in two hours at the Lemon Tree, Aldgate." This was what Micah read as he unfolded the welcome note, and at once proceeded to act on it. Amongst the second-hand clothes establishments at the East End of the town a man may do wonders with two pounds, and within the prescribed time Micah, a new man, met his relative at the place appointed.

"It is what I always told you, Micah," remarked Teddy Blake, after he had listened with many manifestations of impatience to

his brother's story. "The half-and-half business that you was always so sweet on won't do. It never did do, nor ever will. But, there, you know all about that, without any preaching of mine; or, if you don't, you ought; you've tried it long enough."

By which Mr. Blake possibly meant to convey that a systematic course of half-and-half honesty, such as Micah had pursued (on more occasions than the one in question, according to his brother's insinuation) in his capacity of waiter, or in any capacity, was less profitable even than perfect honesty, while at the same time it was perilous as downright roguery. Judging from the airs of superiority assumed by the young man, he had the greatest possible contempt for half-and-half honest people.

"It's hard that a fellow can't go as deep as he likes and no deeper," observed Micah, ruefully; "it's no encouragement to try to be all honest when you can't get credit for being half so when it's your due."

"Did you ever see a man without legs?" asked Teddy Blake.

"Of course I have; what's that to do with it?" snapped Micah.

"Did he get along on one crutch or two?"

"Why, two, of course. How could he get along on one?"

"Of course, he went on two, and both of the same length and shape," responded Micah's brother, philosophically. "He could no more get along on odd crutches, when he loses his legs, than you can get along on your blessed half-and-half crutches, when you get knocked off your honest pins. He'd find himself floored if he tried—just the same as you're floored now."

"Suppose we start from where you just left off, and have no more sermonizing," said Micah, sulkily. "I am floored, there is no doubt about it; what had I best do, can you tell me that?"

Young Mr. Blake shrugged his shoulders, intimating that bad were the best.

"What would you do, if you were in my place? What do you think about the matter, taking it as it stands? Do you think there is much danger of my being looked after?"

"From which quarter?"

"Why, the Wormwood Street quarter, of course."

"I should say that there was a pretty considerable amount of danger," replied his brother, calmly knocking the ash off the end of his cigar. "From what you've told me of this Tadger, I have no doubt that he will have you taken if he can. I only wonder, considering what a bungler you are, that you are here now."

"Then, of course, you think that I had better be off!" exclaimed Micah, turning pale.

"If I thought as you think, I should; there's no doubt of that," replied the young man, with an unbrotherly sneer. "But that's neither here nor there, you want to know how I should act if I found myself in your present predicament?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, I should keep my ground and see what might be made by fighting it out."

"Fighting it out! who with? with Tadger?" exclaimed Micah, in tones of alarm. Possibly as yet he had a wholesome recollection of the weight of that ancient mariner's fist.

“Not with Tadger, because you may pretty safely reckon, before you set to, on what might be made out of a fight with him. No. That Mr. What’s-o-name, the clever old gentleman who so neatly turned the tables on you ; he is the person *I* should look after.”

“That’s mighty easy to say,” said Micah, impatiently ; “haven’t I already told you that I have had my eyes about me for him—curse him—ever since that night ? It’s no use wasting time looking after him, Teddy.”

“Or,” continued the other, not heeding the interruption, “I should make a friend of Mr. Dyot. Yes ; that’s what I should do, now I come to think of it. He’d be found easier tackling than Mr. Balderson, who appears to be one of the wide-awake school.”

“But how could you make a friend of him without making yourself known to him ?”

“Certainly not ; I should make myself known to him,” returned Teddy, coolly. “That’s what *I* should do.”

"It isn't what *I* should do by a precious long way," exclaimed Micah, impatiently. "I fancy I see myself going into Tadger's shop, and politely asking for Mr. Humphrey Dyot. Ha! ha! it's likely, isn't it?" and Micah laughed, derisively.

"It is ten to one against your finding him at Tadger's, even if you mustered pluck enough to go there and make the inquiry," returned the shrewd, though unpleasantly blunt-spoken young man. "He'd be sillier than a hen-sparrow if he stuck to the old nest, after he discovered that his golden eggs had been meddled with."

"Then there is no use in talking any further about it. If both parties are off, and there is no clue to finding them, it seems to me that the best thing I can do is to follow suit, and get out of the way of that infernal old Tadger."

Part of this last speech of his brother Micah seemed to afford the young man not a little amazement as well as amusement, judging from his manner.

"No *what?*" exclaimed he; "no clue! Why, hang it all, man, I can see half-a-

dozen clues, each as thick as a bullock-rope. How about the place—hereabout somewhere, isn't it? where this Mr. Dyot came from to go to Tadger's? How about the porters that ply about Bishopsgate Church, one of whom were pretty sure to be called on to carry his luggage, if he has left Tadger's, which I set down as next to certain? Then, as regards that other chap, Balderson; didn't you say that he was staying at the 'Hand and Vulture,' and mightn't a question or so be profitably asked in that quarter? What about Hogan, the sailor, a fellow who knows both parties? Knows one of them a little too well, I should judge, from his queer way of going on that night——"

"I tell you what," continued young Mr. Blake, who had abruptly paused in his enumeration of clues, and remained silently biting his lip for the space of half a minute, "I tell you what, Micah, if there's anything at all in this cock-and-bull story of yours, Hogan, the sailor, is our man."

Micah looked as though he had arrived suddenly at the same opinion. "But where's

the use of talking ; he's like the others," he presently remarked. "How are you going to find him ?"

"It is you who are going to find him, not me," replied his brother, for whom the cock-and-bull story, considered in connection with Mr. Hogan and his strange behaviour (as detailed in the course of his narrative of explanation by the ex-waiter) seemed to have increasing interest. "It won't do just now for me to be seen making myself busy anywhere ; but it is different with you. If this sailor has not gone to sea again, he is pretty sure to be knocking about between this and Shadwell. The question is, *has* he gone to sea ?"

"He told me that his ship was in dock for repairs ; that's all I know about it," remarked Micah.

"Did he tell you the name of the ship ?" asked his brother.

"It was a woman's name," said Micah, tapping his forehead with his forefinger ; "what the deuce was it ? The 'Amelia' ? No, it wasn't the 'Amelia.' The 'Emily,' that was it—the 'Emily,' from Quebec."

“There we are, then !” exclaimed Teddy Blake, emphatically ; “and yet you talk of having no clues ! If the “Emily” hasn’t sailed, we have Mr. Hogan as good as bagged.”

Acting under his brother’s direction, Micah spent the whole of the next day in making inquiries after the “Emily” from Quebec, and not unsuccessfully. By evening he was enabled to return with the intelligence that the ship was still in dock, and would not sail for three days at least ; and, furthermore, that William Hogan was booked as one of her crew.

The very next night, as William Hogan was strolling disconsolate down Ratcliff Highway—for the “Emily” should have sailed a week since, and the consequence of her detention was disastrous to William’s finances—whom should he run against but the identical waiter with whom he used sometimes to chat while he lodged in Wormwood Street.

“What cheer, my hearty ! why, what brings you this way ? Out for a holiday ?” exclaimed William.

This style of address was very comforting to Mr. Micah, who could not avoid the thought that perhaps Mr. Hogan might have heard of his misfortune.

"Mine are all holidays now," replied he, blithely. "I've left my place. Come and let us have a glass together."

"The very thing I've been pining for this hour and more," returned Mr. Hogan, gratefully, "for you must know I'm starved out o' pocket through knocking about ashore beyond my time."

So they adjourned to a convenient tavern, where there was a cosy little parlour with a jolly fire, and nobody to share it with them but a genteel-looking young fellow, occupied with a pint of ale and a newspaper. That the latter was not a stranger to Micah was quite certain, because their eyes meeting for a moment, the genteel-looking young man winked significantly. However, all the remark he made was, "Good evening, gentlemen!" which salute the gentlemen returned, and then prepared to make themselves comfortable by the fire.

"And so you've left the ship, eh?" remarked Mr. Hogan, presently. "You didn't tell me that you were under warning. Did you leave in a hurry? Had a row and parted?"

"Oh dear, no! Mr. Tadger and I are the best of friends. I left to better myself. True, I *did* come away rather in a hurry; but it's only the fashion to leave Tadger's in a hurry, you know."

And Micah nodded significantly, and laughed.

"That's true," observed Mr. Hogan, growing suddenly serious and shaking his head, but with quite a different shake from Micah's. "*I* left in a hurry, didn't I? Why, you must all have thought that I was out of my senses. What did Tadger say about it?"

"Why, you see, he couldn't make it out. Nobody who saw you start up and bolt in the manner you did, knew what to think about it."

"Did *he* have anything to say about it?" hesitatingly inquired Mr. Hogan, after a pause.

“Who, Tadger?”

“No; the—the man the luggage was for that the porter brought?”

“What, Mr. Dyot, you mean?” replied the ex-waiter, innocently. “No, he said nothing. Seldom had much to say about anything. Singular person.”

“Ah!” responded William Hogan, emphatically. “A very singular person; a much more singular than you imagine, my friend.”

“I’ll bring my chair closer to the fire, if you’ve no objection, gentlemen,” remarked the genteel-looking young man who had winked at Micah; “it is quite chilly at the further end of the room.”

So, as the reader will perceive, that in the most natural way in the world, and without the least leading on the part of the brothers Blake, William was induced, over his second glass of grog, to tell to them his “ghost story.” Never was a narrator blessed with a more attentive or appreciative audience. They must needs know the colour of the sea-jacket which the mate accidentally left on board the abandoned merchantman, the

size and shape of the tin sandwich-box, and what sort of a man Captain Crosbie was, and what had since become of him. Twice over they contrived that William should repeat the exact words the captain used when he discovered the loss of his treasure.

"No wonder that you went off as you did when you saw him coming down-stairs ! I should have gone into a fit or something had it been me !" remarked Micah, as Mr. Hogan brought his narrative to a close. "Your father didn't seem in the least alarmed. I suppose he didn't know the story then ?"

"My father ! *You* never saw my father," replied William Hogan.

"But I did ! I detected a likeness at once. That old gentleman you came in with. A little man, with——"

"That my father !" interrupted Mr. Hogan, with a loud laugh. "Lord love you, my dad would make four of him. No ; that was a doctor chap I had a little business with. Lives somewhere near the Monument. Old Fish Street."

“What, Dr. Balderson, do you mean?”
inquired Micah, stooping to poke the
fire.

“No ; Dr. Gurd. Keeps a pill-
shop.”

“Now, what have you to say about ‘Simon,’ and ‘Blunderer,’ and ‘Numskull’?” he inquired, triumphantly. “Could you have managed better? Speak the truth now, my dear: could you have managed as well? Upon my word, and making the fullest allowance for your talent, my love—your extraordinary tact and talent—I really don’t believe that you could. From the frying-pan out on to the cool hearth is no bad jump for an unlucky fish in danger of frying—who smells the oil bubbling for his seething, by jingo! But the fish that leaps first of all into the fire, and thence out on to an easy-chair, as one may say, without so much as a hair of its head singed, but well and hearty, and with a good appetite for picking the bones of the person who would have fried him! Hey, Mercy, was that the work of a blunderer?”

Really delighted was Miss Gurd at sight of her brother, sound in wind and limb, and free as the air, when she had almost made up her mind that he was by this time a detected robber and a prisoner; but it somewhat cooled her ardour to hear

the tremendous amount of cock-crowing that accompanied the narration of his exploits. She stopped him eventually, however, by reminding him of the extraordinary early and clever bird who, having discovered the first worm, made such a cackling over it that the other birds were awakened and hopped leisurely down to go shares in the spoil they had been at no trouble to secure.

For three weeks had Mr. Dyot partaken of the hospitality of the worthy pill-doctor. Of his hospitality, be it distinctly understood.

Had Anthony been so short-sighted as to invite Humphrey Dyot to exchange his lodgings at Tadger's for others more secure and no dearer in Old Fish Street, it is not improbable that the man of a foreign religion would have hesitated, regarding Anthony's assumed frankness and disinterestedness as one of those cloaks of a hundred fashions it suits the man of business to wear to cover his real designs.

The extent of Mr. Gurd's invitation was that Mr. Dyot should become his guest

until he had opportunity for finding accommodation more private and secure than that he enjoyed in Wormwood Street, and the unsuspecting Humphrey accepted the invitation.

But time passed, and Mr. Dyot was unable to find what he sought.

Relying on Mr. Gurd's superior knowledge of the town, he submitted the result of his inquiries to him, luckily, as it seemed, since in every case the doctor demurred on what appeared to be most substantial grounds.

"But there is no hurry, my dear sir," Anthony had been saying all along, and still said, at the expiration of three weeks, "there is not the slightest occasion for hurry. The little room you at present occupy is really a spare room, and we have grown so used to your charming conversation and society of evenings that we should be downright sorry to lose you ; should we not, Mercy, my dear ?"

"I am almost selfish enough to hope that Mr. Dyot may be yet a very long while before he is in a position to bid us good-bye," remarked Miss Gurd, amiably.

"But really, my good friends," said Humphrey, who, to be sure, had no sort of reason to regret his acceptance of Mr. Gurd's liberal offer (he was delighted to the core of the new and virtuous heart he had taken to himself to find himself associated with so worthy a pair), "it is impossible for matters to continue as at present. It is not as though I were a rich man, who might suitably requite the obligations you would so kindly force on me. I am afraid that I am much poorer than you imagine."

But this is a common complaint in the mouths of wealthy misers, and the hospitable brother and sister merely glanced at each other and smiled.

"I did not tell you before, but I will now," continued Mr. Dyot. "A hundred pounds a year is all that I have to live on. I did not know that I was even so rich, until, returning to England from my vagabond wandering, I discovered that my good father had died bequeathing me as much. Not that I hanker after the mere dross of the world; I have enough of that," continued Mr. Dyot, earnestly. "Thank

God! there is something more precious and worth living for."

"Ah, indeed. The good things of this life don't always take the form of money," Miss Gurd ventured to remark. But her brother, who was rapidly improving as a tactician, frowned at her eagerness, and remarked, sympathisingly,

"To be sure, a hundred pounds a year is not over much."

"It is not, my dear sir; and therefore, as I before remarked, it behoves me to make permanent arrangements as quickly as possible, knowing the limited extent of my means."

Mr. Gurd was silent for a few seconds, and then, hesitatingly, said he,

"Mercy, my dear, will you, or shall I?"

"It was you that suggested it, you know, Tony," replied Miss Gurd, with maiden bashfulness.

"Well, well, it's a simple matter," observed Mr. Gurd, plucking up courage. "My sister and I were thinking, Mr. Dyot, that since you will no longer permit us to regard you as our guest, your stay with us

might nevertheless be arranged, if you were agreeable."

"What my brother means is that we should be glad if you would make your home with us, satisfying your scruples by making payment," said Miss Mercy.

"Now, I thought of that, too," replied Mr. Dyot, looking pleased; "but when I came to consider the matter it seemed to me that I should prove such a profitless and troublesome lodger that I refrained from making the proposition. You see, ma'am, and you, too, Mr. Gurd, I am sure by this time must have observed, I am a very—how shall I describe myself—well, let us say, a very whimsical man."

"Are you? I am sure that I should never have suspected it," observed Mr. Anthony, innocently.

"All men are whimsical, if it comes to that," remarked Miss Mercy, playfully.

"I am afraid that I have not used the proper term," said Mr. Dyot. "I am something beyond whimsical, then; especially concerning the arrangement of my private chamber."

"As to its furniture?" suggested Mr. Gurd.

"Not at all; were it never so humbly furnished it would not be objectionable, if suitable in other respects. In short, what I mean is this, my friends: the chamber that is called mine must *be* mine, as absolutely as though it were my freehold. Mine to do in just as I may choose, without question."

"How does the little room you have lately occupied suit you?" inquired Mr. Gurd, pleasantly, and evidently more inclined to humour Mr. Dyot's "whim" the closer he approached it.

"Well enough; exactly indeed, if it would bear the test of my whim, as I have called it," replied Mr. Dyot, with an odd, sad sort of smile.

"You haven't tested it at present, then?" Mr. Gurd remarked.

"I could not until it were made over to me absolutely; say for at least a year's tenancy," replied Humphrey Dyot, gravely.

Miss Mercy glanced across the table at her brother at this. It was but momentary, but it expressed this much:

"That accounts for his carrying that precious bag out with him wherever he goes. That's the test of a room that will suit him—to make it so secure that he may have no fear as to the safety of his treasure."

"Pray, do you happen to know the substance of the walls of that room, at the thickest part?" inquired Mr. Dyot, suddenly turning to Anthony. It was an extraordinary question, but the doctor was bent on humouring his guest's whim.

"I cannot say, for certain," replied he; "but this is an old house, and I should imagine that the wall, at its stoutest side—which would be the fireplace side—must be twenty inches through."

"Ah! the fireplace side," answered Mr. Dyot, musingly; "that divides the next house from this, of course?"

"Precisely."

"But the other wall—that where the window is, and which makes the back of the house; of what thickness is that, should you imagine?"

"Perhaps a foot," replied Mr. Gurd, consuming in curiosity to know to what end these strange questions were tending.

"More than a foot, Tony, my dear!" put in that gentleman's sister, who was equally curious with her brother, and who thought that she detected a shade of disappointment cross Mr. Humphrey Dyot's face as her brother gave his idea of the wall's measurement; "a foot and a third, I should say, at the very least."

"That would be sixteen inches," said Mr. Dyot, softly, and as though unconscious that he was speaking aloud. "The half of sixteen—one might safely break through half, I suppose—is eight; bare room. "But there," continued he, suddenly looking up and speaking aloud, "I am troubling you with all my nonsensical questions as to thin walls and thick walls to no purpose, in all probability—unless, indeed, they furnish you with an inkling of the troublesome sort of lodger I am likely to become, in the event of your accepting me."

"You would not desire to pull the walls of your room down, thick or thin, I presume?" remarked Anthony, pleasantly.

"Scarcely. I should only require to make a hole of about a foot square partly

through the wall. Pshaw! Why should I make a mystery of my intent, good folks? The simple fact is this: I have occasion for some secure receptacle for a thing I prize very highly. I need not tell you its nature. I should like a wall of my chamber to be of such thickness that it would admit of a strong, shallow, iron safe being built into it. Not as a money-box, take my word, for I have no money more than I have told you of. Any damage that I incurred I need not say I would repair."

"If we should consent to what you ask, you will undertake the occupancy of the apartment for a year," remarked Anthony, who, per wink of his sister's eloquent eye, had the moment before received telegraphic intimation to close with Mr. Dyot on his own terms.

"At as moderate a rental as you can fix on, yes," replied Mr. Dyot.

"What do you say, Mercy, my dear?"

"Well, we have nobody to please or displease but ourselves," answered Miss Mercy, blandly. "The house is our own, "I have not the slightest objection, for my part."

"I am quite of my sister's opinion, sir," pronounced Anthony, holding out his hand to Humphrey Dyot. "As to terms, suppose we say sixty pounds per annum, payable quarterly, that sum to include boarding and every requisite, eh? Let us make it an off-hand bargain, shall we?"

"With all my heart, on such terms as you propose," replied Mr. Dyot, cordially taking Anthony's hand, and, by a hearty shake of it, clenching the contract. "That, then, is settled."

"Quite so, my dear sir; and I hope that you derive as much satisfaction from the settlement as we do," said Anthony. And for once in his life he spoke as sincerely as any man could.

All that day Mr. Anthony went about his business in the best of spirits. On special occasions, when fortune flowed easy with him, it was his custom to treat himself to a comfortable evening in the cosy parlour of the "Tankard," a highly respectable and well-patronised hostel in the immediate neighbourhood. Thither he repaired on the evening in question, and returned therefrom in easy mood at the

sober hour of ten. But his serenity was doomed to a terrible shock. With the burden of that funny song of Tompkins' humming in his mind, he approached his house to within twenty yards or so, when suddenly from the shadow of a lamp, a man darted out on him, catching him so tightly by the throat that he could neither move nor cry out.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HIGHWAY-ROBBER AND HIS VICTIM HOLD
PARLEY; WHICH LEADS TO THE LATTER
PARTING WITH HIS POCKET-BOOK WITH GREAT
SATISFACTION.

THE individual who so suddenly and unceremoniously extinguished Mr. Anthony Gurd's blissful cogitations was no other than his late confidant and betrayed confederate, Micah, the waiter.

It need scarcely be here remarked that Mr. Gurd was not distinguished by the possession of any inordinate amount of personal bravery. Boarding an enemy and engaging him in fair hand-to-hand combat was not by any means to Anthony's taste; he much preferring to lure him to a rocky shore by false lights and there wreck and pillage him, or to un-

dermine and blow him up by means of torpedoes.

Fully three weeks had now elapsed since his parting with Micah, and he had begun to entertain the hope that some happy circumstance had occurred effectually preventing the possibility of an encounter with the man on whom he had played so outrageous a trick, and whose vengeance he so richly merited. It was impossible to misinterpret the vindictive look with which the ex-waiter favoured his persecutor as he was thrust into the closet from which he made his escape ; and the nervous agonies the little man endured for days afterwards would be difficult to describe. Eagerly did he scan the newspapers of the ensuing day in search of a pleasant paragraph bearing some such heading as "Fatal Fall from a House Roof," and followed by a description of Micah's height and complexion, as well as of the clothes he wore. Not discovering what he sought, he was a wretched man indeed. He was afraid to stir out of the house—to look from the window even ; and when, after the expiration of the third day, he did venture abroad, it was with a clumsy

old pistol in his coat-tail pocket, and of which he was as afraid almost as of the fugitive himself.

But the time flew by, and he grew bolder, and was inclined to make light of his old fears. It was certain either that Micah had made a slip from the tiles and had crawled to some out-of-the-way corner to die, or else, escaping unhurt, was only too happy to take himself away as far as possible out of Mr. Tadger's clutches.

Nevertheless, although his assailant seized him from behind (as according to his nature he would) and he had no immediate opportunity of seeing his face, he had no doubt in the least as to who he was. Had the hands as they grasped him cried "Micah!" he could not have arrived at the exact state of the case more instantaneously.

"I know you, you ruffian! I know you!" he gasped. "Hi! Help! Watch! watch!" But he didn't make very much noise. His voice was but cracked and feeble at best, and was not improved by the pressure of Micah's bony knuckles against his windpipe; and all the time the

little man was trembling so that Micah grew quite courageous.

"Know me, you cheat!" said he, in a low voice, but close to Anthony's ear. "There you are wrong; you don't know me, or you would never have dared play your tricks on me. But you *shall* know me, never fear."

"I know you, already!" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, not raising his voice, however, although his assailant had relaxed his grasp on his throat; "you are Micah, from Tadger's—a scoundrel who was glad to escape out of a window in the night to avoid the law; a fellow whom the constables would be delighted to lay hands on. Shall I call them, or will you go away quietly?"

Mr. Gurd having now a view of Micah's features by the lamplight, mistook the pallor that overspread them as arising from fear and cowardice; but Micah was screwed beyond these; he was a man dead-set by desperation. In answer to Mr. Anthony's threatening speech he merely laughed an ugly laugh and shook his head.

"You had better take yourself off," urged Mr. Gurd, still affecting the bluster-

ous, but growing each moment more uncomfortable. "If you don't unhand me this instant I will cry out. It is monstrous that a peaceable man should be set on in this way within hail of his own house; at least when I say"—Mr. Anthony thought that he had been betrayed into saying too much. It suddenly occurred to him that with Micah he was Mr. Balderson, a gentleman from the country.

"It's all right, my dear sir," interrupted Micah, with a repetition of his ominous grin. "It's all right, Mr. Gurd, as you say, within hail of one's own house; within easy hail." And Micah nodded to where the red lamp was glowing in the dusk over the doctor's shop door.

"Mr. Gurd or Mr. Anybodyelse, I am not to be collared in the street by you," replied the assaulted man passionately; "take your hands off."

Micah did so. "Now you are free to go," said he; "go, if you dare!"

Mr. Gurd was cowed completely. The fellow had discovered his name and the place of his abode; what more did he know? To Mr. Anthony's alarmed and

guilty ears how much was conveyed in those three little words "if you dare?"

"Dare! Of course I dare; who's to hinder me?" exclaimed he, standing quite still notwithstanding, and looking up and down Old Fish Street in a very anxious manner, and as though not particularly desirous that his bold language should be overheard. "Why do you come here? What do you want?"

"It is cold, standing talking in the street; let us go and sit somewhere. Let us go into your house, and then you shall know what I want—all that I want," returned Micah, coolly, as he hooked his hand under Anthony's trembling arm and made a step towards the red lamp. But Mr. Gurd turned about with more resolution than he had as yet displayed.

"I have a sick house," said he, "and it mustn't be disturbed by the intrusion of a stranger. Come this way."

"But it will save trouble if we go there at once; you will have to go there before we say good-night," said Micah.

"How do you know that?"

"I presume that you will; you don't

always carry a money-bag about with you, I suppose."

"If that is the business that has brought you here," said Mr. Gurd, savagely, as the pair walked away from the red lamp in the shadow of the houses, "why couldn't you say so at once? Why should you come at me like a highway robber, because you fancy that you've got a claim against me."

"Fancy! Yes, I fancy that I have!" sneered Micah.

"And what may be its extent, pray?" demanded Mr. Gurd, who began to hope that matters were not so terribly bad as he had at first thought they were. "You must look at the business fairly, you know, young man. We both engaged in a certain little affair for our mutual benefit, and we both made a mull of it. So far we're quits."

"So far we're nothing of the sort!" answered Micah. "It was you that made the mull; and it was you, curse you!" continued the ex-waiter, his wrath rising above his prudence at the bare recollection of Anthony's atrocity, "it was you who mulled me. To save your own withered,

little, infernal carcass you would have seen me swing at Newgate. D'ye think I forgive you that? D'ye think that I'll *ever* forgive you?"

They had walked out of the highway and down a narrow turning that led to the river, and at the end of the turning was a low wall, against which, below, the water might be heard sluggishly plashing.

"You'll forgive me, I suppose, when you get what you want," remarked the little pill-doctor, quaking in his shoes. "You don't want more than your due?"

"If I wanted what *is* my due I could take it easily enough now, couldn't I?" replied Micah, with devilry in his tone, and peeping over the low wall as he spoke. "Don't thank me, if I bate of what I might take if I had a mind to. You threw me over for your profit, I abstain from throwing you over (here Micah laid a hand on the low wall) because of my profit; so extremes meet, you see, Mr. Balderson—I beg pardon, Mr. Anthony Gurd. So, you see, I mean to be content with less than my due."

"Let us have an end to this," replied

Anthony, nervously, and glad to get out of this dangerous predicament even at a sacrifice; "what do you expect of me?"

"Forty-five pounds was the sum that you stole from me after I had earned it. Then there is five pounds besides."

"What five pounds?"

"The five-pound note that you gave me at first, and which I was obliged to leave behind."

"What has that to do with me?" exclaimed Mr. Gurd, who never yet was dismayed beyond ability to haggle for guineas. "Why not put down to my account the value of the clothes that you were compelled to leave behind as well; it would be just as reasonable?"

"Just as reasonable," replied Micah, coolly. "Don't hurry me; I was about to mention the clothes. Two suits of clothes—say ten pounds. There was one coat that cost me three guineas out of the money."

"Go on, don't be bashful," observed Anthony, grinning, with rage; "what am I to pay you for the loss of your situation? How much for the forfeiture of your excellent character?"

"For the loss of my situation, since I had only occupied it so short a time, a ten-pound note will satisfy me," answered Micah, calmly. "As to my character, the less said about characters the better, perhaps. We may as well be candid with each other."

Mr. Gurd had manœuvred to walk out of the narrow lane which to his timid mind threatened at one time to have no turning, and the pair were now in Thames Street again, and within hail of the watchman on duty.

"Just so; it is always as well to be candid over business," replied he, in answer to Mr. Micah's last proposition. "I shall be equally candid with you. If I understand you rightly, the sum you demand of me amounts altogether to seventy pounds."

"Exactly the sum, sir," said Micah, blandly.

"And what should I receive in return for such an enormous sum of money, supposing that I had it and were willing to part with it?" asked Mr. Gurd, pausing within twenty yards of a watchman's box, and leaning against the wall.

"I don't exactly understand you," observed Micah, after a few moments of careful reflection.

"I will speak plainer, then. Suppose that, instead of complying with your preposterous demand, I at once raise an alarm and have you arrested?"

"Go on," observed Micah.

"If I do that, say you, then you will take care to make known my complicity in the—in the——"

"Attempted robbery; quite correct. Go on," said Micah, complacently.

"Which statement, I need not remark, I should indignantly deny."

"You need *not* remark it. I should expect nothing else of you," returned Micah, wonderfully at his ease. "But allow me for a moment. If you make a prisoner of me, you would, of course, not deny me the ordinary privilege of advice and counsel."

"You might seek it, but, with my testimony and that of my witnesses, the counsel of all the lawyers in Christendom wouldn't save you from transportation, my friend."

"I shouldn't ask 'em," responded

Micah; "I have no faith in lawyers; he would be a very different sort of counsellor, that one I should send for."

"You might send for the d—l for aught I cared!" remarked Mr. Gurd, impatiently. He thought that he had cornered Micah, and that all this rigmarole talk of his was only to make time to enable him to hit on some way of mending his damaged position. "Say the word—shall I call the constables? You've got hold of the wrong customer, my friend!"

"I shouldn't send for any lawyer," pursued Micah, as though Anthony had not spoken a word; "I should send for a sea-captain."

"For whom?" asked Mr. Gurd, with a sudden start.

"For a sea-captain; for Captain Crosbie. You've heard of Captain Crosbie, I believe, Mr. Gurd? Rare man for sea adventure. Got wrecked out of an East Indiaman homeward bound from Shanghai about this time last year; rich-freighted ship; and, more than all—why, what's the matter?"

No wonder that Micah asked the question. During the last eight or ten seconds

Mr. Anthony had been labouring under an attack of indisposition that momentarily increased in acuteness, judging from the sufferer's contortions. First of all, just, indeed, as Captain Crosbie's name was mentioned, it seemed to seize him in the jaws; for he gave a sudden gasp, and then it ascended to his forehead, which he smote with the flat of his hand, sending the anguish down to his stomach, as it appeared from his manner of bowing down and groaning.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Micah, solicitously.

"Nothing, my friend; nothing to me, that is, because I am used to it—a martyr to it—suffered from it since I was a child. Phew! It's horribly painful while it lasts. Is it too late to get a little brandy, d'ye think? That's a tavern lamp at the end of the street. Let us go and see if we can get a little brandy." And, at a half trot, he set off up the street, bewailing his pains and suffering fresh twinges whenever Micah endeavoured to renew the conversation at that point where the pill-doctor's ailment had broken in on it. So the old fox gained

time to recover from the tremendous Crosbie shock.

Here it was that Micah betrayed his bad generalship. It was exactly as his brother Edward said it would be. "You've no more idea of business than you have of the game of whist; so precious proud and eager you are to let your antagonist see the strong cards you hold, that you play 'em kings against jacks, and aces against trumpery pips, and find yourself beggared before the game is half over. If anything is to be got out of this affair you must let me work the bobbins, Micah." And it wasn't Teddy Blake's fault that he was not engaged that very night working the bobbins against Mr. Gurd. It was his misfortune. The curiosity of the law as to Mr. Blake's complicity in the business that caused his temporary retirement from the scene of his ordinary labours was merely lulled. It woke up again in the most provoking manner the very next morning following the evening when the brothers passed such a pleasant evening in company of Billy Hogan, and ever since Teddy had lain in gaol. After this explanation the

reader will understand how Micah came to engage in the job on his own account.

By the time the brandy-shop was reached, Mr. Gurd's spasms had abated so much that a very little drop of the fiery liquid sufficed for him; while Micah gladly availed himself of a largish measure. He was painfully conscious that Mr. Gurd was humbugging him with his pretended ailment; he perceived clearly that its origin was nothing else but the unexpected mention of the sea-captain's name.

But what was he to do? He couldn't well grapple him to a standstill, accuse him of malingering and demand instant reply to his (Micah's) last observation. The only course was to return to the charge as soon as possible.

"Yes," said Micah, gulping down his brandy; "I should send for the captain soon as ever a key was turned on me."

"You would send for what captain, my good man?"

"For Captain Crosbie."

"And pray, who's Captain Crosskey?" asked Mr. Gurd, looking full at Micah, without so much as blinking.

"Captain Crosbie, I said," growled Micah; "you know very well what I said, and who I mean."

"Captain Crosbie! Captain Crosbie!" said Mr. Gurd, musingly. "To be sure. That was the captain that our friend Dyot sailed under before he started on his present voyage. Well, what about Captain Crosbie?"

"What do you mean by his *present* voyage?" demanded Micah, falling into the artful trap spread for him. "When did he start on it?"

Mr. Gurd suddenly raised his eyes to Micah, as though the question had taken him aback, and then coughed and looked confused, and fidgeted over the little drop of brandy remaining in his glass.

"It is a pity your ears are not so sharp as your tongue, young man," said he; "I never said anything about him starting on a voyage."

"You never meant to say anything about it, is about the truth of it," sneered Micah. "You'd better make a friend than an enemy of me, I give you fair warning."

Mr. Gurd looked gloomy, and bit his lip.

"I know all about it," continued the ex-waiter. "You mustn't suppose, my good sir, that yours is the only keen nose for scenting out a good thing. I know all about the missing jewels and their value. I could lay my hand on the man who stole them. And all I ask is seventy pounds!"

"Why do you come to me?" demanded Mr. Gurd, looking up angrily. "Since you are so knowing, why didn't you drive a bargain with this Dyot before he went off again to sea? Who says that he will ever come back again?"

"You know that he will," replied the deluded Micah. "Do you want me to tell you where he has gone, and how long he will be before he returns? I can, if you desire it."

Mr. Gurd shook his head dejectedly, and came out of the tavern, Micah at his heels, covertly grinning at the immense success of his tactics.

"Look ye here, my friend," exclaimed Mr. Gurd, when they reached a secluded street corner; "I am a simple man, with no great mind for business complications;

but, thank goodness, I have always the sense to know, when I embark in affairs of a ticklish nature, when I am getting out of my depth. I feel that I am out of my depth now, and I intend getting back to shore as soon as possible. There is no use in beating about the bush any longer. By a by-wind I heard about this lost treasure; and, seeing it was fair game, I was willing to speculate a little money on the chance of making its more intimate acquaintance. We needn't mention names."

"Nor aliases," put in Micah.

"Nor aliases. I made a mistake, and was glad to escape as I did. I don't deny that I had thoughts of having another cut in for the prize, but now I am determined to wash my hands of the whole business. Where you got your information from—and without doubt it is correct information—I don't know, and I don't care. You are a younger man than I am, and more daring and enterprising; and I trust that you won't let a single thought of me interfere with your schemes. Regard me as quite wiped out of the speculation, if you please. I wish you luck. It is more than has fallen

to my share ; I am a good fifteen pounds out of pocket one way and another."

"It is a lie!" cried Micah, wrathfully. "You out of pocket, and content to let it be so! That's good. If you think that you are going off like that, you are mistaken."

"Why, what a preposterous fellow you are!" replied Mr. Gurd, remonstratively. "How can I be else than out of pocket? Where's the yield on my outlay? Of the five pounds I gave you—of the money frittered during the four days I was away from home? I am not going off like that! What is to take place first, then? Are you going to reimburse my outlay in consideration of my withdrawing and leaving the path to the treasure clear? That's reasonable, if it is so."

"I'll tell you what is to take place first," exclaimed Micah, nearly beside himself with rage at finding how helpless he was in the little doctor's hands; "this is to take place—I must have my money."

"*My* money, you mean," said Mr. Gurd, beginning to quake again; "you know the penalty of highway robbery, I suppose?"

"I'll have my money," repeated Micah, clenching his bony fist and glaring down on the little doctor.

"There are eight or ten pounds in this," said Mr. Gurd, fumbling out an old pocket-book; "will you take it?"

Micah snatched it from his hand, and after a moment's inspection thrust it into his pocket.

"Now, be off," said he; "walk straight to your own house, while I stand here and watch you. I dared you to cry out or give any alarm once before to-night, I dare you again."

Mr. Gurd allowed himself to be dared with impunity. For the moment he felt alarm lest Micah should fall on and bruise him; but as soon as he got away a grin that would have considerably astonished the ex-waiter overspread his still pale face, and remained there till he reached his door.

It was now late, and old Mrs. Chinery being ill of a cold, had retired to bed; so Mercy herself opened the door for her brother. Seeing him so pale, and yet so twinkling, she naturally thought that, for once in

a while, Anthony had overstepped the bounds of sobriety.

"Lock the door, my love, and put the chain up. Bolt the top and bottom as well," said he, hastily.

"We can't bolt out the precious headache you'll have in the morning," answered Mercy, grimly, as she proceeded to obey her brother's injunctions.

"H-u-u-sh; is he a-bed?" inquired Anthony, calmly and softly. He meant Mr. Humphrey Dyot.

"Been a-bed these two hours," replied Mercy, in the same voice. "Why?"

"I wish he could be kept a-bed," returned Anthony, anxiously, "We shall lose him now, unless we're very careful. The vultures have smelt him out, at least one has; let us come up-stairs and I will tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. CHINERY RETIRES FROM SERVITUDE—
MARY KETTERING PUTS IN AN APPEARANCE.

POOR old Mrs. Chinery's cold grew worse and worse, so that one fine morning, or rather, one particularly bleak and dreary morning, she was compelled to acknowledge herself too ill to rise from the flimsy straw mattress and truckle bedstead with which her mistress, in consideration of her years and infirmities, had handsomely provided her.

Her place of sleeping was in the back attic, which was immediately over the cosy chamber of maiden Mercy Gurd, and when, at the accustomed hour of five a.m., that lady jerked the string that communicated with a bell hanging within a yard of the poor old drudge's ear, and jerked and jerked again, all that Mrs. Chinery could do

was to hang a lean arm out of bed and rap the floor with her iron candlestick, as a signal that this morning the customary order of things must be reversed, and her mistress wait on her.

"I can't get up, please mum," humbly pleaded feeble Chinery, in reply to Miss Gurd's imperative demand to be informed what the dickens and all his angels the old woman meant by fetching her out of bed in this manner. "I've got it all down my back, please mum, and I feels as though I should break when I goes to bend."

"Fiddlestick!" replied Miss Mercy; "enough to weaken you when you lay sweltering all night in this manner;" and as she spoke, with an energetic hand she plucked off the bed the old woman's scanty petticoats, there spread to eke out the one thin blanket and tattered counterpane. "This nonsense won't do for me, you know; if you want a skulk, you had better pack off back to the house."

This last observation Miss Gurd delivered with the utmost confidence, never yet having found it ineffective in rousing Mrs. Chinery to the finest extremity of her

fast dwindling physical capacity. The "house" Mercy alluded to was the work-house, from which source, ever since she had been a house-keeper, she had drawn her supply of menial servitude.

Instead, however, of Mrs. Chinery at once jumping up, goaded thereto by the amiable lady's threats, she only wagged her old head on the bolster, and began to cry.

"I knows it, I knows it," she moaned; "I've been a-thinking on it ever since I put the candle out last night, and I can't help it. If I could on'y bend I might manage;" and here, with a prodigious struggle, she endeavoured to raise her shoulders from the mattress. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! I can't! I'm afeared, mum, that I shall never bend any more."

"Of course," remarked Miss Mercy, savagely; "you're like the last one we had from the house; you're like 'em all. You come here, and live on the fat of the land till you grow too lazy to work, and then go back and take your ease. But don't you be mistaken; I'll send such a character back with you as will stick to you, I'll warrant."

If Mrs. Chinery had been feasting on the fat of the land, decidedly it had not agreed with her. But possibly Miss Gurd spoke literally, rather than figuratively. Mrs. Chinery *had*, since she had resided in Old Fish Street, lived on the fat of the land, with a very limited proportion of its lean. Mercy might have added the bones of the land, which, as well as the fat, had fallen largely to Mrs. Chinery's share, as well as the crusts, and such other refuse of the upper table; her drink being nothing less ambrosial than a brewery of the upper table's much impoverished tea-leaves. But the worn-out old scrub could do no more than moan the more vehemently, as she heard her mistress' spiteful speech, and dismally wag her head on the uncovered bolster.

Finding that matters were really so desperate, Mercy hurried down to her brother's bed-room, and acquainted him with the unpleasant news.

"I'll get up at once," exclaimed Anthony, briskly. "Confound her and her unbending and bending! we mustn't have a dead body in the house, Mercy, my dear.

I'll run round and tell them to fetch her at once."

"I've been thinking, Tony," said his sister, "if they ask you at the work-house if they are to send another old woman in Chinery's place, say that you haven't quite made up your mind on the matter."

"Oh! what are you going to do, then?" inquired Mr. Anthony, in wonderment. "We can't do without one, my love, can we?"

"We'll have a regular servant. There's one more to wait on now, recollect Tony," whispered his sister. "If he should be ailing and take to his bed, another old thing like Chinery would be no use pottering about the house."

So, in the course of the morning, Mrs. Chinery, still unable to bend, was conveyed out of the house and deposited in her dreadful old home; and the very next morning there appeared in the newspaper an advertisement to the effect that a strong, able-bodied young woman, able to cook plainly and not averse to making herself generally useful, at a wage of seven pounds a year,

might find what she desired by applying at Dr. Gurd's, Old Fish Street, near the Monument.

"I shouldn't put it 'Dr. Gurd,'" suggested Anthony.

"Why not? You ain't ashamed of your name, are you?" remarked his sister, sharply.

"The number of the house would do just as well; or, say, the initials of my name. Some of these servants don't like coming into a business house, I'm told," said Anthony.

"Then they're exactly the sort we don't want, and I hope that the way I've worded the advertisement will warn all such off," replied Miss Gurd. "I thought you meant that we might make it a line shorter, and so save a shilling: there would be some sense in that."

"Well, you know best, I suppose," remarked her brother; and so the advertisement was forwarded forthwith.

Now, this small altercation between the sister and brother, insignificant as it may appear, was really more important in its results than in many an angry controversy

of months' duration. As says the old song, those were the days "when female servants housework would do;" and seven pounds per annum was a sum at which Mary Jane of the last generation could not afford to despise. Young women by the dozen read Mr. Gurd's advertisement and meditated a journey to Old Fish Street.

But there was one young woman who read the advertisement, and who was more moved by it than all the others, albeit she was not by any means the sort of person the notice was directed to. It was by the merest chance in the world that the newspaper came into her hands so soon after its publication, for newspapers cost money in those days; and her father, although not a downright poor man, could do no more than decently live out of his labour and the profits of his harness-maker's shop—the luxury of news, foreign and political, at a daily cost of sixpence, being denied him. Which was the more a pity, since Job Kettering was a man who took great interest in the welfare of the Constitution of his country, and had the most fervent loves and hatreds for many men high in power and who had

never heard of his existence. His harness-shop, in the High Street of Kensington, was next door but one to that of a rich and Radical tallow-chandler, who was on friendly terms with Job Kettering. Just at this time the question of reform was vexing the nation's soul; and the Radicals having, according to the morning's paper, administered a crushing blow to their opponents, the tallow-chandler was so elated that, having possessed himself of the glorious intelligence, nothing would do but that he must make Job as happy as himself; and so he came stumping into the shop—for he was a very fat man—with the paper in his hand.

“Is your father in, Polly?” he inquired of the young woman, who was sitting there alone stitching a saddle-cloth.

“He will be here presently, sir,” said Polly.

“Just show him this paragraph, will you, when he comes in? This one, Polly,” and with his great finger he indicated which he meant. “Here, I’ll stick an awl through it, and then he can’t miss it.” And, so saying, the tallow-chandler impaled the

paper in its most precious part on to the work-bench.

Naturally enough, soon as his back was turned, Miss Kettering, although no politician, got up from her work to read the paragraph the awl was stuck through, and, quite as naturally, finding nothing in it that in the least interested her, her eyes glanced over the page in search of something that might.

It was an aimless sort of glance, however, as indeed were all her glances. Why she should be sad was a puzzle to persons ignorant of her little history, for she was a remarkably healthy-looking, pretty, young woman, with a face and figure that had driven to the verge of delirium half the single young tradesmen in the High Street. She was an only daughter, too; and proud enough was her old dad of her: too proud, her mother said, with a face sadder even than Mary's—too fond of praising her beauty and hearing it praised. This was one time o' day, however—a year ago, say. Never once since had old Kettering been heard to brag of his pretty Polly, or to mention her name even, except to such an

old crony and family man as was the chandler, for instance.

Polly, with the saddle-cloth in her hand and a length of drab thread between her ruddy lips, glanced over the paper with dull eyes. Instantly, however, they lit brilliantly, and dropping the saddle-cloth, she clapped her hands on the paper as though what was there that fascinated would escape unless she held it. This was Mr. Gurd's advertisement.

"That's the name!" exclaimed she, half aloud, as she bent down to the newspaper, with her bright eyes dimmed with tears. "I heard it but once, only once, and never since. That's the name—Gurd, Doctor Gurd!" And there she remained bowed over the paper, with a face that betokened much confusion of thought, growing pale and red alternately, now with her grey eyes filled with tenderness which has but one spring, now with tears of bitterness, now with the fire of defiance. It was a fortunate thing that, after measuring Sibley's mare for a new collar, her father stayed to drink a glass of ale with Sibley's groom. Enough to provoke any right-

minded harness-maker to find an unfinished saddle-cloth—blue, stitched drab—lying like an old clout amongst dirty leather and wax-ends.

As it was, however, by the time old Kettering returned, Mary was at work again to all appearance, just as he had left her. To be sure, he might have observed that her eyes were red and her cheeks whiter than usual; but he was primed with ale to enjoy the Radical triumph, and chuckled and crowed within two yards of his daughter as he read the bit of news that the tallow-chandler had speared.

“Aha! we’ve got ’em on the hip now! Once let us get the heels of these lordlings off our necks, and we’ll scramble up out of the dust in a twinkling, and show ’em the stuff we’re made of, eh, Mary?”

“Yes, indeed, father,” replied Mary, apathetically. But a moment after she smiled a grim little smile and bit her lips, as a determined woman with a secret does.

This was Mary Kettering’s secret—she was the mother of that little child Osborne (previous mention of whom the reader of good memory may recollect as occurring

in the early part of this history) whose death had afforded Miss Mercy Gurd and her brother and the professional gentleman in the City such immense satisfaction. Let us for a moment raise the curtain from events past five months and more.

“And can you, can you, be so heartless as to deprive her of her child? Is it not sufficient that you tear me from her, but that you must stab her prostrate form with this keener anguish?” urged weak-minded baby’s father, blubbering like a schoolboy to his high-minded and inexorable mamma, as with her own delicate hands that lady superintended the hasty packing of the portmanteaus that were to accompany the disgrace of the family to banishment.

“Do not afflict yourself on that score, my son; fools may be always hooked with cunning bait; let that comfort you as regards the leather-cutter’s creature. As for the minor abomination, it is a matter of charity as well as of convenience that it is taken away at once and from her father’s house; it will save her the further iniquity of exposing it on my door-steps.” So answered mamma. But herein she did the

leather-cutter's creature injustice. "I did not send for you here to listen to your ridiculous crying and fussing," said baby's grand grandmother to its affrighted other grandmother, who had been hurriedly fetched in a hackney-coach from High Street, Kensington, "the simple question is this—are we to have charge of this child at once and without question, or do you prefer that all the responsibility and disgrace and expense shall remain with you? If the latter is your decision, there is an end to the matter for good and all—mind, for good and all. If you are wise enough, however, to accept my proposition, as I have little doubt that you will," said her ladyship, sneeringly, "this good woman will accompany you back to your house, along with this gentleman, and the business is settled."

The gentleman in question was her ladyship's lawyer, a good-natured, fatherly man, who, when her ladyship's back was for a moment turned to them, signalled to Mrs. Kettering by an unmistakable expression of countenance that it would be the maddest thing in the world

to act adverse to her ladyship's desires; and, to do him justice, he thus conveyed a more candid opinion than is often obtained of a lawyer, even on an expenditure of six and eightpence. The "good woman" likewise present was no other than Miss Mercy Gurd, hastily summoned for the occasion, and who in high, good-humour at the terms suggested, provided the affair might be brought about satisfactorily, wore a face of such amiability that she would have been thoroughly ashamed of it could she but have seen it in a looking-glass. There was not a minute for making up one's mind. There was her ladyship drumming on the side-board with her white finger tips as an auctioneer toys with his hammer previous to making the irrevocable tap that clinches the bargain; there was the lawyer with his pen ready dipped in ink; and there was the "good woman," smiling and smirking, with the cosiest, fleeciast shawl imaginable hanging over her arm, and which, as plainly as though it were so ticketed, was "to wrap the baby bunting in."

What else could she do but say, yes,

poor soul? To be sure, she might have urged the propriety of consulting her husband in the matter; but where was the use of consulting with a man who for the last three days had been mentally in little better condition than a March hare, talking of nothing else but blunderbusses and blowing a certain somebody's brains out?

After all, the baby was the pivot on which the whole scandal turned. At present, the neighbours to the left and right of the harness-maker's no more suspected a baby than an alligator as inhabiting old Kettering's house, and if it were removed at once, they need never know. No one need know except the few discreet ones who were at present acquainted with the lamentable fact, and, next to abolishing the said fact, nothing could be more desirable.

"I hope I am deciding for the best; God knows that I think I am," spoke Mary's mother.

"I am certain that you are deciding for the best, ma'am," remarked the lawyer, "there can be no two opinions about that;"

while the good woman with the fleecy shawl turned her eyes towards the chandelier, as though mutely returning thanks to some deity there resident for putting it into the mother's heart to decide as she had; while her ladyship, by a final descent of her hovering fingers on to the mahogany, knocked down the lot, and then hurriedly quitted the room, as though glad that the irksome duty devolving on her was so satisfactorily ended; and there then remained nothing but for the person appointed its custodian to fetch the lot away from where it was at present housed.

This was accomplished without the young mother's knowledge, who, thanks to the ingenuity of the medical gentleman in attendance, slept a sounder sleep than nature unassisted vouchsafed.

"It's a pity," said the doctor; "poor little woman: she seems very fond of her baby; but, there, she'll find comfort in crying, and be reconciled to its loss in a week."

It was now nearly five months since the unlucky little creature in question (whose name was no more Osborne than it

was Brown or Jenkins) was lost to its mother. At the height of her trouble she had accidentally heard a name mentioned in connection with her child's future provision ; but it had passed, with much other tumultuous drift, out of her mind. Mr. Gurd's advertisement recalled it. Dr. Gurd : could it possibly be the same ? If so, here was a chance she had pined for secretly, for months and months ; a chance of hearing news of the little one ! Anyhow, there could be no harm in seeing this Dr. Gurd and judging whether he was the sort of man who would carefully provide for a helpless infant. To do this were easy enough. Taking advantage of the advertisement, all that was necessary was to attire herself neatly and as became a domestic servant, and make application in make believe earnest. She might easily enough put her project into effect that very afternoon, for her mother was gone on a visit to Brentford, and her father took little heed of her comings and goings. She might go and come back again in three hours.

And, attired as a highly respectable

servant-of-all-work, she made her way to Old Fish Street, where, in the shop, she found at least half a dozen idle maids awaiting their turn for inspection and examination by the lady of the house. Mary's turn was last; and, feeling very like an impostor, and to avoid the inquisitorial looks and questions of the other females, she took a printed paper from a heap on the counter and diligently applied herself to its perusal.

The reader is acquainted with the document. It was that one which terminated with the *nota bene* descriptive of Miss Gurd's share in the business, and her ability and willingness to provide nurses, wet or dry, on the shortest notice. The certainty that she had now discovered *the* Doctor Gurd affected Mary's head with a giddiness which increased, despite her battling against it, and she would have fallen off the shop chair had not a sturdy maid opportunely caught her.

"That's a good un!" giggled the scraggiest and oldest of the unemployed. "You calls yourself strong and active, I 'spose!"

"I've had a long walk," explained Mary, recovering as rapidly as she had fallen away. "I did not think it was so far, and I foolishly walked all the way."

"You should a' ordered John to have got the carriage," giggled scraggy again; but as her delicate sarcasm was unappreciated, she had no more to say. Just then down came the charwoman who temporarily occupied the place of Chinery, and who, after scanning the expectant company in the shop, beckoned Mary.

"I'm next, if *you* please, ma'am!" exclaimed the scraggy one, bouncing before Mary.

"No, you ain't; missus said that the most 'spectable looking was to come up, so you'll just please to wait till the last," said the charwoman.

So up the stairs went Mary Kettering, and the next moment she stood before the Messrs. Gurd.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH MARY KETTERING SHOWS HERSELF
EQUAL TO THE SITUATION IN MORE SENSES
THAN ONE.

THE door of the room in which the two inquisitors sat was ajar, so that when Mary Kettering reached the stair-head she obtained a fair view of them. From the said stair-head to the table where Mercy and her brother were was a distance of fifteen feet, perhaps, requiring scarcely more than seven steps to traverse it, the process occupying not necessarily more than five seconds. Nevertheless, even before Mary had paid courtesy to Miss Gurd, she had made estimate of her, and resolved on a course that but a minute before was farthest from her thoughts. There is no such sharpener of the optics as jealousy, and there is a jealousy more potent even than that of a

woman for her lover—that of a mother for the welfare of her little ones. Nor is this peculiar to human kind. A cat exhibits precisely the same amount of solicitude for its endangered kitten, and the lioness will unconcernedly squat on her haunches and take no more than amused interest in the bloody combat that for her sake is engaged in by two four-footed foresters of the mane-royal; but meddle with her cubs, so much as cast eyes at the snuggery where they are couched, and 'ware hawk! She'll have you if she creeps on her belly a mile or more, so as to take you unaware and make you certain.

Mercy, too, had made estimate of Mary Kettering. At first glance she discovered that she was not at all the person required to take the place of old Mrs. Chinery. To be sure, the present applicant was big enough, and strong-looking, and healthy, and able; still there was something about her that Miss Gurd did not like. It wasn't because she looked too ladylike; for that would, of course, be rather pleasing than otherwise to a woman of Mercy's malicious mind; but there was an expression in the

young woman's eyes, a peculiarity in her manner, a certain something that words will not express, and which Mercy could not have given utterance to had she been called on to do so, that was decidedly objectionable. And when she glanced at her brother and discovered not the slightest symptom of emotions kindred with her own visible in his countenance, the indescribable feeling increased very considerably.

"I'm afraid the situation won't suit you, miss," remarked Miss Gurd, looking her hardest and sourest at Mary.

Now here, as anyone might have reasonably expected, would have been an end to the negotiation. It was never seriously entertained by Mary. All she had stipulated for, all she had promised herself, was a sight of and speech with the persons whom she suspected of having the bestowal of her child; and so far her desire had been gratified to the letter. Nay, she had met with success beyond what she could reasonably have reckoned on; she had discovered what she regarded as abundant evidence that her surmise that this might turn out to be *the* Doctor Gurd, was correct, and now nothing

could be easier than to reply suitably to Miss Gurd's ungracious observation, and take her departure back to Kensington. But women are such perverse creatures. In five seconds she had resolved on a certain course, and, strangely enough, Mercy's studied hardness and sourness only confirmed her in that resolve.

"You must have been mistaken, I think, young woman, in your reading of our advertisement," remarked Miss Gurd. "What we require is a strong, strapping wench, with more respect for the comfort of her master and mistress than for the colour of her hands—or the ridiculous curling of her hair."

Mary's hair was in curls in the morning; and though she, with the firmest of hands and the most stubborn of brushes, had endeavoured to subdue its natural tendency, the shrewd eyes of Miss Gurd discovered symptoms of its rebellion from beneath the plaits of the young woman's neat little cap.

"I think I read the advertisement carefully, ma'am," replied Mary. "You require a strong and active person, accustomed to

plain cooking, and willing to make herself otherwise useful."

"Generally useful were the words," put in Anthony, who since Mary entered the room had never once shifted the direction of his spectacles from her face.

"Which means scrubbing, and pot-scouring, and—and mucking about generally, in fact," said Miss Mercy, spitefully.

"I am prepared to do all that, ma'am," replied Mary, quietly.

"No holidays; you understand that, of course?"

"I did not understand it, ma'am; but that would not be objectionable," responded Mary, deferentially.

"No fly-away ribbons in your cap."

Mary nodded her acquiescence.

"No followers. Above all things, no followers." Miss Gurd made sure that she had the pretty young woman this time.

"You need have no apprehensions on that score, I assure you, ma'am," replied Mary, with a tincture of bitterness in her tone that was, of course, lost on Miss Gurd.

"And where are you now in service?" inquired Mercy.

"I was never yet in service, ma'am. I come from home, where I have always been," said Mary.

"Oh, indeed!" remarked Mercy, looking at her brother as though she would say, "I suspected something of this kind." "And where, pray, may your home be?"

"It would be useless to tell you, that ma'am," replied Mary, hesitatingly; "because—because, my parents are averse to my going to service, and would do all they could to hinder it."

"And why are you so anxious to leave your home?" sneeringly inquired Miss Gurd. "Young women as well off as you apparently are, are not generally very eager to take to drudgery in a strange house."

"I—I can't agree with my parents. I am anxious to earn my own bread—very anxious."

And, truly, Mary looked so, the more as her hopes of earning it of the Messrs. Gurd grew fainter.

Mercy shook her head. "You had better carry that pretty story somewhere

else, young woman," said she. "We are blunt people here. What security should we have that you would not lay hands on all you could as soon as you got here, and make off with it?"

Good Lord! There was guarantee against such behaviour on Mary's part in the sudden flushing of her face and the flashing of her eyes, even had what it was possible "to lay hands on" with a larcenous intent in the Gurd establishment been a thousand times more valuable.

Mr. Gurd observed this. "My dear!" said he, remonstratively.

"Fiddlesticks! what security should we have? Come, now, answer me that!" exclaimed Mercy.

"Is this the sort of creature that is responsible for the well-doing of my poor baby?" was the bitter thought that made Mary's lips quiver.

It is wonderful the activity of the mind under desperate circumstances! "I had not forgotten that objection to your hiring me, ma'am," replied Mary, meekly. "I should be able to give you some sort of security. At one time I had thoughts of

engaging in some light business, and have been saving my money to that end. I have twenty pounds put by. I have no doubt that it would be as safe in your hands as where it now lies, if it would be any satisfaction to you to hold it?"

"Ay, ay!" ejaculated Anthony, touching Mercy's foot under the table.

"Well, there may be something in that," returned Mercy; "not much, but something. You mean to say that if we were inclined to engage you under the peculiar—the *very* peculiar circumstances under which you apply, that you will bring your twenty pounds in your hand, and let us hold it as security for your honesty?"

"Exactly."

"Well, my love, for my part——" began Anthony.

"Your part is to hold your tongue while I am arranging my own affairs," snapped his amiable sister. "When you find me incapable of doing so, Mr. Gurd, it will be time for you to interfere. What wages would you require?"

"Seven pounds a year, I think, is

the sum stated in the advertisement, ma'am."

"Exactly; but that was for an experienced servant. It is a very different matter when one hires a person ignorant of her duties, and who will require no end of teaching. Seven pounds, indeed! I should think that you would be glad to come for less than half that."

"I should indeed be glad to be engaged at any wages," spoke Mary, earnestly.

"That's spoken like a sensible girl," returned Mercy, graciously. "Then let us understand each other. You bring us twenty pounds to hold instead of giving us the satisfaction of inquiring into your character; and your wages are to be—well, I said *less* than half the seven pounds; but I should be sorry to be hard on anyone who is willing to work; let us say half—three pounds ten, that is—out of which you will be required to buy only your butter and sugar; the teapot you have when we have done with it."

"Those terms will satisfy me, ma'am," replied Mary, promptly. "When can I enter on my duties?"

"The sooner the better. Our last servant has gone away ill; she was very loth to leave us, but illness cannot be prevented, of course. We are without a regular servant at this moment. Can you come to-morrow?"

Mary would have suggested coming back that same evening, but it occurred to her that she had already shown herself over eager in the transaction; therefore she replied that she would come again and complete the arrangement to-morrow evening. And so she took her departure.

"She'll answer our purpose, I suppose," remarked Mercy; "she's cheap, and she looks able enough, if she is willing."

"There's one thing: if she's in such a mighty hurry to run away from home, she may take it into her head to bolt back again at as short a notice. I wonder *why* she's running away from home?"

"We shouldn't guess, if we tried for a month, so I shan't attempt it. One thing is certain. I would rather hold twenty pounds security, or ten even, than the best written recommendation a servant could bring with her."

"But, there! for that matter, we may never set eyes on her again," said Anthony.

"No fear of that, mark my words!" replied Mercy, confidently.

Miss Gurd was correct. At the time appointed Mary Kettering (Mary Marsh she called herself) punctually reappeared. She had had a busy time of it since yesterday—a sorrowful, harassing time. Her story of having money saved was an invention; but what she did have was a considerable number of more or less valuable trinkets and jewels, presented to her by baby's father.

Mary, to buy bread, would not have parted with so much as an eardrop or the bead of a necklace of his buying, but she did not for an instant scruple to convert them into a means of enabling her to gratify her burning desire to discover her child—his child. So, that afternoon, arriving home after her visit to Old Fish Street, she shut herself in her room, and, unearthing her treasures every one, made an unromantic parcel of them and carried them to a still

less romantic pawnbroker residing at Knightsbridge, who, after duly testing the dainty love-gifts with aquafortis, expressed his willingness to advance, by way of loan, the sum of twenty and seven pounds on them. Of this sum twenty pounds was already bespoke; and with the remainder she purchased certain necessary articles of servant's clothing, and afterwards a box at a box-maker's, giving directions that the latter should be carried to the draper's to be packed. So that, by the exercise of some amount of womanly tact, and the sacrifice of a larger amount of womanly feeling, she was enabled on the following evening, without hindrance or exciting suspicion even, to take a long farewell of home and arrive at the scene of her future service in the most commonplace way imaginable.

Mrs. Chinery's late sleeping-chamber was Mary's, and the iron candlestick with which the feeble old workhouse-woman had rapped on the floor to summon her mistress, was Mary's as well. Having a horror of lying awake in the dark, Mrs. Chinery had set up a tall new candle that night, and

gazed on its dull flame, thinking and thinking till her poor old eyes were so bleared with crying that it gave her no light at all, and she clapped the extinguisher on it, regarding it as sheer waste to keep it burning any longer. Of this identical candle there was left still a good two inches, and it burnt lively as ever, though Mrs. Chinery by this time was herself extinguished, poor old soul, and lay in her shell in the work-house shed awaiting burying-day. Quite an experienced chamber candle was that; its flame had looked down on Mrs. Chinery moaning and groaning in the pangs of rheumatism; it had been witness to the disrobing of a wheezy, grumpy old charwoman who robbed it of its tallow to anoint her nose before she lay down to anathematize straw mattresses, thin sheets, and pill-doctors; and now at the mature age of three nights, it blinked and winked on pretty Mary Kettering, wondering, you may be sure, if it could wonder at all, what on earth she found to cry about without a rheumatic pain in her whole body, and plump enough to set hard beds at defiance,

and with a nose that all the tallow in Russia could not improve. Weep, Mary did, however, and weeping she was still when the candle flame, curious to its last gasp, leapt up to see.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "STICKERS" AND THE MONTHLIES.—
THE DEAD-LETTER DRAWER.—MARY KET-
TERING FINDS WHAT SHE LOOKS FOR AND
MORE THAN SHE SEEKS.

THE candle flame would have expired even in greater astonishment than that which disturbed its last moments could it have known that the tears of Mrs. Chinery's youthful successor owed their origin to joy and not to grief.

Such was the case, however. To be sure there is nothing delightful in lying on an ancient straw bed, with a leaky, slanting garret ceiling scarce five feet overhead, black and weather-stained, especially if, by way of contrast, there is present in the mind a recollection of a very different condition of things terminating only yesterday. As high in the main street as the great

gardens at Kensington was old Kettering's shop, and so closely adjoining them that from Mary's bed-room window the rustling of the leafy boughs was distinctly audible when the wind blew ever so gently, and the flower-beds were visible and the odour of green grass refreshed the neat little chamber even to its remotest curtained recesses ; whereas all the greenery visible from the window of Mary's present high-perched chamber was the mildewy moss that draped the prevalent tiles, and the wind made but dismal communing, whistling in at the paper-mended window-panes.

Nevertheless, and despite these various unfavourable comparisons, they were tears of joy that bedewed Mary Kettering's eyes. It was now a matter of twenty weeks and over since they had drugged and cheated her ; and though, Heaven knows, she had shed tears enough, they had brought her no comfort. But now her tears have lost their bitterness. Hope has sweetened them, and their flowing mitigates the consuming thirst in which her heart has lain parching through five long months. To be sure very little has been gained at pre-

sent, but it is something to be "on the road," be it never so steep and stony—something to have made a start with "eyes right" and the journey before you, be it never so long a one. That she was on the right road each succeeding day's experience of Miss Gurd's peculiar business further convinced her ; but, beyond this tantalizing knowledge, it was a mere raising of the feet and setting them down again, without the least advance. That Miss Gurd dealt in babies was certain. None were kept in the house, which offered no convenience for nurses, wet or dry. It was an out-door business, and chiefly conducted by means of the postman. Every morning brought a batch of letters, addressed generally in the scrawling hand of illiterate women, and bearing the postmarks of suburban towns and villages, such as Mitcham, Croydon, or Ilford. It was Mary's duty to take these letters in and lay them on the breakfast-table for Miss Gurd to discuss along with her tea and toast. Asorely-tempting occupation this for Mary Kettering ! That the letters contained information chiefly concerning children, she had no doubt ; for when she

was rung up out of the kitchen to remove the breakfast things, three times out of four the conversation taking place between the lady of the house and her brother was relative to the well-doing or otherwise of some little "beggar" or "brat" intrusted to Mercy's guardianship. There appeared to be, if Mary's quick ears understood aright, two varieties of brats and beggars in Miss Gurd's keeping—one called "stickers," and the other "monthlies;" and it was extraordinary the difference of sentiment the good lady entertained for one and the other.

"Humph! Crutchley writes that the last brat sent down to her is mending. *That's* pleasant news, anyhow!" and Mercy, with an ugly scowl, thrust Crutchley's letter into her pocket.

"I thought the last time she wrote she mentioned that smallpox was raging in the village!" remarked Anthony, indignantly; "why the deuce else did she suppose that we sent the two 'stickers' down there for change of air?"

"She's had them vaccinated, I shouldn't wonder!" sneered his sister; "sews camphor in their clothes to keep away the in-

fection, probably. She's a bright article, isn't she ? calls herself a woman that knows her business !"

"She's very good at 'monthlies,' but at 'stickers' she's nothing better than an idiot," pronounced Anthony, "you must write and tell her so, my love."

On another occasion, at the same time in the morning, when Mary entered the room under cover of a replenished coal-scuttle, Miss Mercy was reading aloud an epistle from Isleworth.

" . . . two fits since last Tuesday week, which the doctor says is owing to the coveture of his spine and poorness of his blood, and strongly recommended strengtheners. But he can't eat 'em. Biled pork he turns up his nose at ; and a lovely bullock's heart wot we had baked and stuffed on Sunday made him reach his 'art out a'most. He 'pears like to be a-sinking fast."

"You'd better take the coach and go there this afternoon, Tony," exclaimed Miss Mercy ; "and take some wine and arrow-root with you, and tell her that she shall be allowed eighteenpence more a week to

buy him nourishing things till the brat gets better. And tell her, Tony, to mind that he *does* have 'em, and that those confounded young hungry 'stickers' don't thieve the things away from him."

By the latter part of Miss Gurd's remarks, Mary judged that the poor little weak-backed boy, whoever he was, must be a "monthly"—*i.e.*, a child who was contracted for by the month; whereas the "stickers" were those miserable little wretches whom for a round sum the Gurds "adopted" for a term of years. What was her own little boy? The ailing little martyr to boiled pork and bullock's heart could scarcely be he, since as yet he could not have a tooth in his precious mouth for the mastication of either. And thinking of baby's precious mouth, that little pursy, rosy mouth, under this condition, and that, such a picture sprang up to the woful young mother's mind, as caused her to cry and sob until the shaky kitchen table, on which her elbows rested, creaked again.

Mary continued to take in the morning letters, and to wistfully wonder over them, and to invent all manner of artful devices

that might lead to her being called into the room while their contents were being discussed.

But, and as before remarked, it was weary work, and nothing but daily renewed dread and perplexity came of it. The names of the nurses of the children were seldom mentioned, those of the children never; so that all that she heard only tortured and tantalized her.

There were a set of letters post-marked Mitcham, and, because they were more respectable-looking and neater in their appearance than any of the others, Mary got it into her head—probably because baby's father was of so tremendously respectable a family—that they concerned her.

As it happened, she never had the luck to hear any part of one of these Mitcham letters read or discussed, and she was, consequently, the more anxious respecting them. In reality, these Mitcham letters affected Mary Kettering no more than the man in the moon, emanating as they did from a dropsical market-gardener of that vegetable-growing district, who was silly enough to imagine that he derived immense

relief from the medicinal use of Mr. Gurd's pills, and who was constantly writing up for a fresh supply.

Letters were not securely fastened in those days, as in the present, a wafer, or part of one, being the sole medium of adhesion. "If I dared open it, it might in an instant tell me all that I desire to know!" would be Mary's frequent reflection, as she turned the mad market-gardener's letter over and over in her hand. Any news of my darling would be welcome news. If he is well and in health, and in gentle hands, I should be satisfied; if he is ill-cared for and neglected, if he is one of these miserable adopted ones, then it would be a satisfaction to me to know it; to hasten to where they have hidden him away, and claim him, and take him from them, and keep him all to myself—all to myself, though I sang street-ballads to buy us bread. If I dared open this, it might tell me all, and set my heart at rest." But she did not dare; even her desperation could not make her so far dishonest. Then, all on a sudden, came to her the question, "Where does Miss Gurd keep her letters? That she does not burn

them I am sure. What does she do with them?"

And from that hour Mary Kettering turned her attention rather to the discovery of the receptacle where her mistress's old letters were deposited than to gleaning for such scraps of information as fell from the Gurd breakfast table. She had not long to seek. Indeed, Miss Gurd made no great secret of stowing away her old letters. In the sitting-room that adjoined Mercy's bedroom (the room in which Billy Hogan first related the ghost story while Mercy, eavesdropping in her boudoir, took notes of the same) was an old-fashioned oaken chest of drawers, and one day Mary, being in attendance on her mistress, was requested to fetch some article of feminine adornment from a drawer of the chest.

Mercy, calling from the inner room, mentioned the "open" drawer, and Mary misunderstood her to say "bottom" drawer, and without noticing that the one atop was slightly pulled out with a bunch of keys dangling from the keyhole, she tugged at the brass handles of the bottom drawer, and with a creak open it came, revealing to her

startled gaze quite a heap of letters, very many thrown in promiscuously, and many more tied into bundles and labelled.

Here was what she had so longingly sought; here reposed the talisman that would reveal to her where her darling treasure was, and how he grew, and how he looked and fared. There were letters that she had long suspected as being accessories to her cruel bereavement—the Mitcham ones—tied in a bundle some of them, and some, those last received, lying on the top of the rest, half open, and with a little of the interior writing visible.

All this Mary saw at a single glance, as it were, while her hands trembled and she grew swiftly hot and cold. Sorely was she tempted to borrow that little Mitcham packet just for an hour, or at most until next morning. The drawer was unlocked now; probably she might wait in vain for months for such a chance to occur again. But then suppose that after she had abstracted the packet Miss Gurd should lock the drawer, rendering it impossible for her to replace it. *Then* what should she do? Still, if the worst came to the worst——

“Am I to wait all day long for my spencer, you dawdling slut?” squalled Mercy, at this critical moment; and Mary was recalled to a sense of prudence, and, softly closing the precious drawer, inquired, in return, of her mistress, which drawer she had mentioned; to which Mercy deigned no reply, but, bouncing in in a pet, remarked that Mary was the greatest fool that ever was born; and, getting the spencer herself, locked the drawer and returned the keys to her pocket. Despite Mary’s shame and confusion, however, it did not escape her that her mistress made no attempt to lock the bottom drawer.

But as before remarked, she was only made the more miserable by the discovery. It was bad enough to be lucklessly seeking, but worse by far to light on the prize, and at the same moment discover that her hands were tied so that she could not possess herself of it. There was no help for it. What though the drawer remained unlocked, what though its coveted contents were taken out and piled in a heap on a table in the room? They were secure from her. All day long (except when she

went out on business, when she invariably locked the door) Mercy occupied the room; and, though Mary was allowed to enter it early in the morning in her capacity of housemaid, and while Miss Gurd was still a-bed, it was impossible to say one moment from the next that she was safe from a sudden apparition in a morning robe and night-cap. So day after day passed for the space of a week, each morning bringing letters from Mitcham or elsewhere, which were discussed and consigned to the oaken tomb, to lie with their dead kindred.

Then suddenly, and unexpectedly as the discovery of the dead-letter drawer, came an opportunity of gratifying her great desire. The household was a-bed an hour or more when there came a loud ringing at the bell, in reply to which Anthony popped his head out of window.

"What do you mean by 'immediately'?" Mary heard Mr. Gurd ask of somebody below.

"Now; this moment. There is a coach waiting here for her," was the answer. "Mention my name to her, if you please—Dr. Austin."

Then Mary heard Anthony grumbling as he paddled up the stairs, with the ends of his braces draggling behind him.

"It is Doctor Austin ; says you are to go immediately ; coach at the door now." She further heard Mr. Gurd call to his sister, "What shall I tell him ? That you will come first thing in the morning ?"

"Tell him I'll be down in five minutes. I've been expecting him," was Miss Gurd's prompt response. "Don't disturb yourself, Tony ; I shan't be back till daylight, I dare-say."

So Anthony, merely remarking "all right !" hurried down to bed again, faster than he came up, and in rather less than five minutes Mercy was heard descending the stairs to the outer door, which she opened and shut behind her with a bang.

At the first alarm Mary had sat up in bed, and so she remained until Miss Gurd's departure. Then, as though acting on some hurriedly-formed resolution, she arose, and, without the least noise, dressed herself. Then she stole on tiptoe to the door, which

she opened just a little and listened. There could be no doubt that Anthony had once more contentedly resigned himself to slumber, for he was snoring with his accustomed vehemence.

Then, with a white face and features determinedly set, Mary took her candle, and with no more noise than a cat might make, crept down-stairs to the chamber Miss Mercy Gurd had so recently and hastily vacated.

To her great delight the bottom drawer of the chest was *not* locked ; but in the stillness of the night, the creaking that accompanied its opening was so alarming that her guilty hands trembled the more as she tugged at the brass handles. Open at last, however ; fairly open, revealing the rich feast to the greedy eyes of the solitary guest, aching with hunger. Dainty, too, since she did not fall-to indiscriminately, but picked her dishes. These were the dishes from Mitcham, but they palled on her palate at the very first mouthful, as one may say. "Thanks to your unwallable pills, I continer to have a happertite like any orse," the first letter began, which was,

of course, quite enough to dispel the long cherished Mitcham illusion.

There were letters by the hundred, and, in a fever of excitement, she read into each one until convinced that it could not concern her darling. It was astonishing the extent of Miss Gurd's business in this peculiar line, and equally astonishing the sameness of spirit in which the nurses wrote respecting their helpless charges—cold, merciless, and business-like. No word of pity in describing the ailments of a sick baby, no more than though the "article" treated of were a barrow that had broken down, or of a stool discovered to be rickety in its legs. Many grumbling letters complaining of the scantiness of Miss Gurd's pay, contrasted with the increasing dearness of bread and milk, and the impossibility of giving the children a bellyful at the price; but no letter that concerned Mary Kettering.

So all the loose letters were overhauled, and none remained but those that were tied in packets. The very first packet Mary took up—it was bound round with a fragment of a dirty staylace—caused her to

start and utter a cry that, although stifled in its birth, certainly might have been heard by Mr. Anthony, had he been awake and listening.

Scrawled on the outer letter, in pencil, was the little word, "Dead." Somehow she had never thought of her baby as dead. She had pictured it ill-nursed, ill-fed, and neglected, but never as dead; and even now she hurriedly put down the packet on which the shocking little word was written and took up another.

"Taken home" was this time the pencil indorsement; and, as she knew that no such thing could have happened to her child, she put this aside also. But the next was a "dead" packet, and the next, and then a "taken home." They were all "taken home" or "dead;" so there was nothing for her to do but, with trembling fingers and a quaking heart, to seek her baby amongst the defunct.

She found it at the first cast. The little packet bound in the scrap of dirty staylace was *its* packet. Some subtle essence of death seemed to lurk in Mrs. Craven's last doleful epistle that seized on the young

mother's hands as she held it and read it, creeping up her arms and into her heart, stopping the current of her blood.

Miss Mercy, had she noiselessly and unexpectedly returned, would never have recognized that "strong and active young woman," her servant, in the white-faced figure kneeling at the dead-letter drawer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH IS BRIEF AND BITTER.

As, possibly, the reader may recollect, Mrs. Craven's last letter to her employers concerning "little Osborne," contained the certificate of that unhappy young person's right and title to churchyard rest and peace; and this, together with what in the estimation of the worthy pill-doctor and his sister was the next important part of the nurse's communication—to wit, the financial part—was all that at the time was published.

But there was more than this for Mary Kettering's reading. "It is my humble dooty, my dear madam," the letter began, "to take up my pen to let you know of the deth of the child Osborne, as was expected in my last, and, I may say, the one before that, convulsions gaining on him, as he had one after another successfully. He went

so easy that, though sleeping in the same room, as one may say, 'cept for a thin petition, I knowed nothing of it till the little gal he slep with cum and told me how cold he was, by which I suppose he went off in the nite. I got the doctor's stifferkit, however, as well as the undertaker's, giving his age as three months and a fortnit, as I was able to do, recollectin' as you should say, when I fetched him, that you got him from his mother the night before, and that he was born on the prevus Sunday, which was the aith of October. I've sent you up a lock of his black, curley hair, in case his mar might have a fancy for such. The doctor's bill," etc.

Born on Sunday, the 8th of October. Taken away from his mother on a Tuesday night! There could not possibly be any mistake. Of all the days of the past year, of any year, those alluded to in Mrs. Craven's epistle were more wofully familiar to the mind of Mary Kettering than any other. They were her "red-letter days," with a vengeance, branded on her memory and scarring it ineffaceably. It was applying the hot iron anew to the scars, this perusal

of the dead letter ; and she could no more doubt that the child mentioned—the poor, neglected little creature whose life had fled, unmissed and all in the dark—was hers than she could doubt the existence of the paper that shook in her trembling fingers. She did not cry out when the full weight of the crushing blow fell on her. Mute and terribly amazed, she read and re-read the ill-spelt scrawl, always stopping at “ he was born on Sunday, the 8th of October,” and then allowing her weary eyes to travel upward again to the line that told of his death ; and, so engaged, she grew momentarily weaker and paler, and in all probability would presently have sunk quite, had not her eyes, guided by kind Providence, sought again the line immediately below the old halting-place—the line that told of the saved lock of curly black hair. This brought her to life at once.

The letter was wretchedly written, and at first glance it was uncertain whether the words were “ I’ve sent,” or “ I’ll send.” An instant scrutiny, however, convinced Mary that it stood “ I’ve sent.” Where was it, then ? No longer pale, but with a flushed

face and eager eyes, she tossed about the heap of waste paper lying on the ground before her. Had every flimsy old letter there been her deadliest enemy, bent on concealing from her her treasure, she could not have snatched at and shaken it more spitefully. But no little black curly lock. How could she expect to find it? Was it at all likely that Miss Gurd would take pains to preserve so insignificant a thing as a scrap of baby's hair? More likely, as she sat at her breakfast, she took it with contempt between her finger and thumb, and tossed it into the fire. And when Mary arrived at this terrible conclusion she started to her feet with her hands clenched, and an expression in her eyes, such as would have given that maiden lady, had she seen it, quite a new idea of her maid-of-all-work's character. Had Mary Kettering suspected her mistress of burning her baby instead of one of its curls, deadlier vengeance could not have stirred her.

But this fury-flashing was of no longer duration than a gunpowder flame. Her act of sudden rising caused a something to tumble from the folds of her dress on to

the scattered papers, with a faint, crispy sound, and, lo! there was the precious relic curled up like a tiny black snake with a red head, the latter represented by the scrap of worsted of that colour with which Mrs. Craven, having nothing handier, had secured the ends of the curl when she cropped it from the head of dead baby. Fire and water. Down sank Mary to her knees once more, with the little black curl thrust into her bosom, and her hands crossed and clasped tightly over it, rocking to and fro, and sobbing, while the just now flashing eyes were quenched in big, welling tears.

She grew calmer in a little while, and set about reading the other letters of the packet—of *her* packet, with baby's curl still reposing where for so brief a season of bitter-sweet baby's head had lain. To be sure; she did not have Miss Gurd's letters to peruse; but their tone was reflected in Mrs. Craven's answers. "You are quite under a mistake, dear madam," wrote Mrs. Craven on one occasion, "when you accuse me of neglecting them whose lives is of consequents to take care of those whose little lives can only be a burthen to them on

account of their ailing. I am not unmindful, madam, nor ungrateful, and I knows my duty ; and I forgot to mention in my last that I did not call the doctor in when the child Osborne was took with his last fit. The doctor was sent for for the child Gough's measles, and so happened to be present when Osborne was took ; so that, dear madam, I hope you will see that when you accused me of sending for the doctor for him you blamed me wrongfully."

And in another letter, dated a fortnight afterwards :—

"I am very much obliged to you, madam, for your new offer ; but, as you say, I cannot imbrace it until little Osborne is out of his misery, which I am afraid will be shortly ; and a happy release, another eighteenpence a week bean a objek with a poor women like me. Hot baths when he is very bad, the doctor says ; *but I aint that cruel* to torture him, dear madam, knowing as he can't last if let alone."

So that by the time that Mary Kettering had arrived at the end of the pretty batch, it became evident enough to her that the "child Osborne" had been led quick-march

down to his little grave by Mrs. Craven, abetted and encouraged by Miss Mercy Gurd. No more weeping; no more tender heart-flutterings. Nothing but grim hatred and a determination fixed as the rocks for vengeance. Quite cool, too, and steady. Every letter refolded, every packet neatly re-tied and placed where it had been taken from. No display of emotion even when it came to binding round *the* packet with the scrap of dirty staylace.

But she had still to make further discovery. When this the last little parcel was secured, Mary took a lingering look at the topmost letter—that in which little Osborne's death was announced—and then she perceived pencil-writing on the cover of it, rubbed, and faded, and difficult to decipher. Something about a shipwreck, the pencil-writing was, and about a seaman left to die, and a Mr. Dyot, and a case of enormously valuable jewels. This letter Mary slipped from the parcel; and, after she had effectually effaced all traces of her visit, carried it with her back to her attic.

It is no secret to the reader, the pencil-writing on the back of Mrs. Craven's letter.

As related in an early chapter of this history—Chapter III., if I rightly remember—when Mr. William Hogan came to complete his purchase of the child's caul, Miss Mercy, being in *déshabille*, retired to the inner chamber during the negotiation which led to the relating of the "ghost story," and to Miss Gurd's taking notes of the same on the fly-leaf of Mrs. Craven's letter, from lack of anything handier.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH IS DEVOTED CHIEFLY TO THE PUTTING
TOGETHER OF SUNDRY "THIS'S" AND "THATS"
TOWARDS MAKING HALTERS FOR NECKS BE-
FITTING.

"WHERE is he?"

"Gone to bed this hour and more."

"It would be better for us if he stayed
a-bed. The vultures have smelt him out.
Come up-stairs and I will tell you all
about it."

The worthy couple thereon went up-
stairs, and Mr. Gurd informed his sister of
the particulars of his evening's adventure.

"What's to be done?" asked Anthony,
anxiously, the difficulties of the case appear-
ing even more formidable than before, now
that they were deliberately set out.

"Of course; the old story," replied
Mercy, sneeringly. "You can kick up your

heels bravely enough in shallow water, and splash and puddle famously ; but soon as you get out of your depth you call on me to help you out. I'm sure I don't know what is to be done. It's delightful to think that you have brought your fish to land only that somebody else may carry it off, isn't it ?"

"But they can't carry it off if they don't know that it is here," replied Anthony ; "so long as we provide against their knowing that, he is safe enough."

"Which will be just so long and no longer than between this and when he goes out again for a walk," returned his sister. "If you hadn't been a fool you would have given him into custody as a thief, instead of leading him to understand that it was worth your while to allow him to rob you of ten pounds so that he might keep his mouth shut."

It was all very well for Mercy to talk in this strain ; but she only knew as much of the interview between Mr. Anthony and the ex-waiter as the former had been pleased to tell her. That little scene by the low river wall, together with the devilish mis-

chief expressed in Micah's eyes, and his own heart-quaking threats; and, again, the threatening gestures and meaning emphasis that accompanied Micah's "if you dare," he had not thought it worth while to mention to his sister, who was always too glad of an opportunity to taunt him with cowardice.

"Well, well; what I did was for the best," replied he, surlily; "and you couldn't have done more. I suppose that you'll admit *that*. There's one thing to be said—Dyot doesn't go out much; and it is by no means sure that this vagabond waiter will dare show his face again. It won't be too late to give him in charge, after all, if he should."

Mercy laughed at this. "If he should! Don't trouble yourself on that score. He's a fox that will not fail to pay a second visit to the roost now that he has found out that the watch-dog is muzzled. You'll have him here, Tony, never fear. He'll lurk about until he meets our lodger, and then there will be a pretty end to the business."

Anthony remained silent, biting his lip nervously for a minute. "Well, then, the

simple case is that he must *not* meet him," said he, at length, speaking in a lower whisper than hitherto, but with full determination.

"Another clever plan, eh!" replied his sister, derisively. "You are going to prevent two men with eyes in their head seeing each other when they meet in the street!"

"No; it is my intention to prevent their meeting in the street, my dear. I wish you wouldn't speak so loud." And Anthony glanced guiltily towards the door.

"What! are you going to kill him, Tony, dear?" Tony started and raised his eyes to his sister's as she said this. "Are you going to lay wait for him as he did for you [this continuation altered the expression of Tony's face curiously], with a big stick in your hands, and beat him within an inch of his life? Don't be rash, my little brother. He's a biggish man, didn't you say?"

"When you've done sneering, p'raps you'll listen to what I've got to say, like a sensible woman."

"I'm not jeering now, Tony, I'm quite serious; speak your mind, little man."

"It is soon said. Dyot must leave his room seldom as possible. He must be persuaded that the safest place for him is at home." And Anthony regarded his sister with eyes more plain-spoken than his speech.

Mercy responded to the look with one equally meaningful, and kept her eyes fixed on her brother's, diving to the depths of them, until she had fished up their entire contents. Then, with a shrug of her angular shoulders and a sigh, "That is how this sort of things grows; so we go on," said she.

"Of course you understand exactly what I mean?" observed Anthony, hastily. "You know me too well, I trust, my dear, to suppose that——"

"Why, I suppose that I do know you better than *that*. The idea!" interrupted Miss Gurd.

"Quite as much for his sake as ours, if it comes to that," continued Mr. Anthony, by way of driving back the tagrag and bobtail of cowardly fears that came trooping into his mind in the wake of the bold resolution. "Quite as much for his sake

as ours. More, I may say. He is comfortable and well cared for here; but if these hawks get him amongst them, by gad! you know, my dear, they'd pick his bones and leave him in the gutter before a week had passed."

"He doesn't appear to have any friends, does he?" remarked Mercy, after a pause. "No one has been here to inquire after him. I believe that he might die and be buried, poor fellow! and no one but ourselves a bit the wiser." This is how this sort of thing grows; so we go on!

Anyhow, the poor fellow from that night, ran no risk of encountering the prowling Micah (taking for granted Miss Gurd's prognostication that the ex-waiter did come prowling) in the open street. The fact is that he did not venture abroad. Since the day when he went as far as Eastcheap to a safemaker's there, to order the kind of strong-box he was in want of, he had not crossed the outer threshold of Mr. Gurd's house. The strong-box was duly brought home, and for a day or two Mr. Dyot found enough to occupy his time in

superintending the operations of the bricklayer engaged to sink the box into the wall. He was a clever and neat-handed man, and his work was satisfactory.

"And what do you think of the job as a whole?" asked Humphrey Dyot. "What do you think of it as a safe?"

"What sort of a lock might the box have, sir?" asked the bricklayer.

Humphrey showed him the key.

"What's my opinion, sir? Well, I'll tell you," said Mr. Bricklayer, handling the key as does a man with a knowledge of such instruments; "the King's crown, locked up in the Tower, isn't safer than anything you may please to turn the key on here. A man might have his death-warrant shut up in it and still live to a respectable old age, if it depended on somebody picking the lock to get at the document."

"I'm very glad to hear you give such a good account of it," remarked Mr. Dyot, heartily.

Mr. Gurd was present.

"How came you to know about keys and strong-boxes, Mr. Bricklayer?" he

inquired, pleasantly, as he took the key in his own hand.

"My father was a locksmith, sir," replied the man; "I can do a bit at the trade myself, at a pinch."

"Humph! It is a strange key, isn't it? It would take somebody cleverer than a cobbler to make such a one."

"That's true, sir," replied the bricklayer, who was proud to show his knowledge of locks. "I'll tell you where it differs from common keys. A common key, you see—I could explain it easier if I had a bit of paper."

"Here's a piece," said Mr. Dyot, who was amused at the man's earnestness.

"A common key," continued the bricklayer, wetting the top of his square black-lead pencil in his lips, "is warded in this way," and he rapidly drew the wards of a common key on the paper. "But a key to fit a lock such as this box has got must be differently made; it must have——"

And the amateur locksmith proceeded to make a neat and accurate pencil drawing

of the sort of key that would open the strong-box.

"Quite a universal genius—bricklayer, locksmith, and draughtsman," said Mr. Dyot, as, after examining the drawing, he handed it to Mr. Gurd for his inspection.

"Don't understand much about drawings, myself," remarked Mr. Gurd, giving the paper no more than a glance and then crushing it up to the size of a pellet. Mr. Dyot's window was open. "There goes the confounded cat that keeps up such a precious disturbance of nights," said he, at the same time pointing out an animal of the feline species crossing the tiles. "Huish!" and Mr. Gurd flung at it the paper pellet, which tumbled down into the yard.

And there it lay until some hours afterwards, when Mr. Gurd took occasion to pick it up and fold it smoothly, and place it in his pocket-book.

"Now that you have your room arranged to your satisfaction, you will have leisure to get abroad a bit," said Mr. Gurd to his lodger. "Really, you take too little exercise and fresh air, my dear sir. I should

be sorry to alarm you, but you really are growing paler day by day in consequence."

"Thank you, I am quite well," answered Mr. Dyot; "but you are right in what you say, and I will get out for an hour's walk to-morrow."

But he did not. He rose with the best of intentions, but they failed him when he had taken his breakfast; and when his landlord, brisk and shining, came knocking at his door to ask if he felt inclined for a trip down the river as far as Deptford, Humphrey, looking up from the book he was reading, declined. He felt chilly, he said, and somewhat giddy when he attempted to walk.

"All that is nothing; mere stay-at-home symptoms," exclaimed Mr. Gurd, endeavouring to rally the other. "Come along!"

"Thank you; I would rather that you excused me this morning," replied the poor gentleman.

"Well, if you won't take good advice, I'm sorry for you," replied Mr. Gurd. But

it was by no means the smirk of a sorry man that played about his mouth as he retreated down the stairs.

He had not left his room for over a fortnight at the time when Mary Kettering made her astonishing discovery. When she was engaged she was informed that the gentleman residing there was an invalid of eccentric habits, who was chiefly anxious on account of the persecutions of a swarm of poor relations, to keep the place of his residence a secret. "One or another of them sometimes lurk about here for hours together hoping to obtain a glimpse of him," said Miss Gurd; "so that if, when you happen to go out, anyone should ask you questions, you will take care to reply that you know nothing of any lodger here."

But no one had accosted Mary on the subject any time when she had been on errands, and, since the trouble that the eccentric gentleman caused her was next to none at all—Miss Gurd waiting on him invariably—she thought very little about him, and least of all that her employers entertained iniquitous designs against him.

But now, enlightened by the Craven correspondence and the other that had come under her observation during her hour's communing at the dead-letter drawer, the foremost idea that sprang out of her sudden hatred for the Gurds was that they could have dealings with no one without iniquitous designs; and therefore she set to work the more diligently to make herself acquainted with the mysterious pencillings concerning Mr. Humphrey Dyot which were inscribed on the blank part of Mrs. Craven's last letter.

Miss Gurd's caligraphy, never as plain as print, was in the present instance peculiarly cramped and difficult to decipher. The best that Mary Kettering could make of the "notes" was as follows :—

"Sailor's name William Hogan. Says that Tadger's lodger, Dyot, was once shipmate of his. Ship 'Reaper,' Captain Crosbie. H. D. shipped at Shanghai, to make up for hand short. H. D. took fever; dying. 'Reaper' wrecked in storm, crew take boats, ship sinking. H. D. crazy with fever, come away and leave him on board

alone. Great treasure of captain's in first-mate's keeping, left behind aboard in mate's jacket pocket, along with mad H. D. Captain offers fifty pounds a man if they'll row back for it, and cries [this written with more care than any other portion of the interesting document], 'I'm a ruined man; a hundred fortunes such as mine would not cover the loss.' Mad H. D. shows on deck, flourishing jacket over his head—signal to be took off. Boat rows off, and leave him. H. D. turns up eleven months after at Tadger's, *well to do, and with luggage which he is very careful of*. W. H. sees him there, and runs off in fright. W. H. don't know what great treasure was—in a tin case."

Hatred is a capital whetstone for the wits, and Mary Kettering was many removes from a born fool. Here was mystery, to say the least of it, and it was much easier for Mary to believe that Miss Gurd would indulge in mystery for the sake of evil rather than good. Besides, in the young woman's excited and unhealthy condition of mind, it appeared to her no more than an ordination

of Providence that, at the same time that she discovered her great injury, there should be revealed to her and placed within her grasp a weapon that might be applied towards the discomfiture of her enemies. Not at all an uncommon development of human weakness is this vain presumption that in our disagreement with our neighbours we have Providence on our side, and not a bit the less prevalent after the thousand and one examples that we are altogether mistaken in our selfish conclusions. This, however, may be said of Mary Kettering, her grievance was not absolutely selfish. She suffered on her baby's account, and what she was so eager to avenge was baby's wrongs, and not her own.

What was the length and strength of the weapon which an all-wise Providence had so mysteriously placed in her hands? What did she know of this Mr. Dyot? No more than that he was a gentleman of but indifferent health, who kept his room almost constantly, there finding employment or amusement. A harmless, inoffensive man, of but few words, and those kind ones in-

variably. He took his meals solitarily, and was so jealous of his privacy that when he was within, his door was always locked, and when he opened it it was never more than a foot or so. Mary knew about the strong-box in Mr. Dyot's room; indeed, it was since she had been in Mr. Gurd's service that it was bought and fixed. But there was nothing in all this to attract the special attention of a servant. She had been told that Mr. Dyot was an eccentric person living secluded from his poor relations; therefore, in all probability he had money, and the strong-box was to keep it in. The Gurds were solicitous for his welfare as though he were a man who paid well for their services. His food Mercy prepared with her own hands, and her brother appeared as anxious for his health's sake as she. It was spring-time now, and the mornings were bright and sunny. "Hurry up his breakfast, Mercy, my dear," Mary once heard Anthony remark to his sister; "this confoundedly fine morning will tempt him to go out else." By which Mary understood him to mean that it would be bad

for the invalid if he were tempted to walk abroad breakfastless.

The only time that Mary ever witnessed anything in the least remarkable in the behaviour of either Anthony or his sister towards the eccentric gentleman, was early one morning, when she had been in their service about a week. There was something amiss with the water-pipes, so that the kitchen was flooded, and the brother and sister were fussing about in great consternation—Mercy, as was her habit when excited, squalling her commands and suggestions at the full of her deep chest voice. Nobody heard him, but suddenly the kitchen door opened, and Mr. Humphrey Dyot stood in the entry, blandly inquiring what the matter was, and could he be of any assistance. He had not been out of bed very long, it seemed, for his hair was in wild disorder, and he wore neither waistcoat nor neckerchief; but, as though to make up for the absence of the former garment, instead of his dressing-gown, he had on a heavy, rough seaman's jacket, with great pockets, and the collar turned up to

his ears, making a quaint setting for his white face.

Anthony was the first to perceive him, and with a loud, startled cry he sprang back, nearly capsizing his sister, who, poised on her pattens, was scooping up water into a pail.

"Mercy ! Mercy !" were the words that he cried out ; but whether the words were addressed to his sister merely to call her attention to the sudden appearance, or were uttered in the form of supplication for protection against some impending peril, was not clear.

By the time that Mercy recovered her equilibrium and faced about, Mr. Dyot was laughing so that it was no wonder if she saw less cause for alarm than her brother.

"Thank you," replied Miss Gurd, in answer to Humphrey's offer of assistance ; "it is very tiresome ; but we have got it under at last. I wouldn't stay here in the damp if I were you, sir."

So Mr. Dyot went up-stairs again, and then said Anthony to his sister,

"Did you see *that* !"

"Of course, I saw it ; but I didn't squeak out like a stuck pig, or rush battering against anybody, fit to break their ribs," replied Miss Gurd, tartly.

"But the jacket I mean ; you noticed the jacket, Mercy ? the heavy pilot jacket that——"

"Oh bother," interrupted his sister, impatiently ; "he may dress how he pleases, I suppose. You are making a great fuss about nothing."

"But it was the exact picture. Good Lord ! I ain't a bit surprised that that foolish fellow Hogan——"

"Run up-stairs and see how the fire in my room is burning, Mary," exclaimed Mercy. And Mary heard no more of the conversation, being only too glad to escape, and much more impressed with the comical side of the little scene than with any other. By the time she had put away the breakfast things she had probably forgotten all about it.

But now that she was in possession of Miss Gurd's notes, these little circum-

stances, and numerous others concerning "mad H. D.," pressed forward in her memory for review. To start with, it was perfectly clear that Mercy had not told the truth when she declared that she had known Humphrey Dyot since his childhood; according to the pencilling on the back of Mrs. Craven's letter—which was dated—she could not have known him longer than a few weeks. So much, then, for the "old acquaintance," and tender consideration on that account.

In the next place, for what reason had the Gurdys, soon as they had become acquainted with his story, induced the infirm gentleman to quit Tadger's (whoever Tadger might be), and take up his abode with them? They were not needy people, glad to put up with certain inconvenience for the sake of what profit might be made out of his board and lodging. They were not charitable people, such as would offer a stranger asylum for pity sake; this last view of the matter was too absurd to be entertained for a single moment. Why, then, did they want him there?

What was a likely solution to the mystery? Why, that the worthy pair, her master and mistress, having in so strange a manner obtained possession of the story of the lost treasure in connection with the marvellous resurrection of Humphrey Dyot, had kept that knowledge to themselves, and having trapped "mad H. D." into their house, still kept the secret, in hopes that this tremendous something might—somehow—revert to them. Somehow! The fact of the mysterious man buying an iron chest to keep the treasure in did not promise well for his voluntary abandonment of it in favour of his landlord. By what means could the Gurds hope to enrich themselves out of his nest of golden eggs? If Mr. Dyot had reasons for supposing that Anthony and his sister were ignorant of his precious hoard, it was scarcely likely that he would declare his dishonesty by giving them a share of it. If he went away he would undoubtedly take his treasure along with him; but if he neither went away nor enriched them by an act of generosity, why, then, they must be content to wait until the

poor gentleman—of whose health they were so very, very careful—died.

“That is what they would have to wait for ; that is what they *are* waiting for ; and these are the people who trade on the life and death of little children !”

END OF FIRST VOLUME.

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